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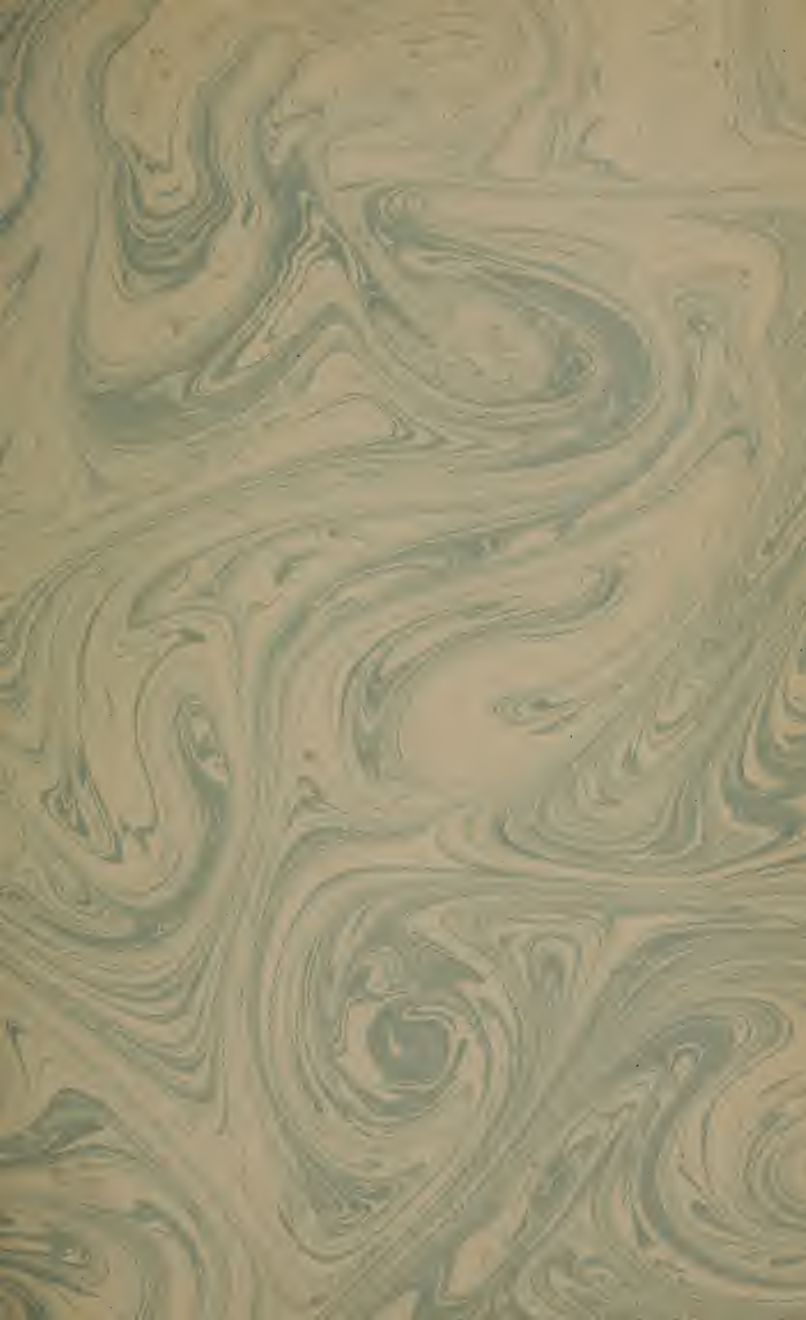


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THE GIRAFFE HUNTERS.

VOL. III.

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THE GIRAFFE HUNTERS.

BY

CAPTAIN MAYNE REID,

AUTHOR OF

"THE RIFLE RANGERS," "THE SCALP HUNTERS,"

ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE GIRAFFE HUNTERS.

CHAPTER I.

A TALK ABOUT OSTRICHES.

THE ostrich (*Struthio Camelus*) is supposed to be the Reuonim, Jaanat, and Joneh, mentioned in the Bible.

It is the "*Thar Edsjaiemel*," or Camel-bird of the Persians, of which everybody knows something, and of which nobody knows all.

With the general appearance of the

bird, I shall presume that my readers are already acquainted, and shall therefore say little or nothing about it.

The stumpy-footed, two-toed, long-legged, kicking creature has wings that are apparently more useful to man than to itself.

In fact, the possession of these apparently superfluous appendages is generally the cause of its being hunted by man, and by him destroyed.

It is one of those unfortunate creatures persecuted to gratify the vanity of other—perhaps equally unfortunate—creatures, called fashionable ladies.

A full-grown ostrich is usually between seven and eight feet in height; but individuals have occasionally been met with measuring more than ten.

Its nest is merely a hole in the sand,

about three feet in diameter, and usually contains twenty eggs. Half this number may be seen lying outside the nest, and elsewhere scattered over the plain. These are supposed to be intended as food for the young, when they have first broken the shell. This supposition, however, is not founded upon the observation of any fact to justify a belief in it.

Job, chap. xxxix., speaking of the ostrich, says, she "Leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in the dust, and forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them. She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not hers: her labour is in vain without fear."

This account does not altogether correspond with modern observation.

In the heat of the day, when the eggs are under the burning sun, the ostrich can well afford to leave them for awhile, and go off in quest of food.

At night, when it is cool, and the eggs need protection, the bird is ever to be found doing its duty. The male ostrich is often seen in charge of the young brood, and assiduously guarding them.

At such times, if molested, the old birds have been known to act in the same way as the partridge or plover, shamming lame, so as to mislead the intruder.

From much more now known of the ostrich, it cannot be said to be wanting in paternal or maternal instincts; and the idea of its being so, has only originated in the fact of their nests being so often found deserted during the hot hours of the day.

The food of the ostrich generally consists of seeds and leaves of various plants.

Owing to the nature of the dry desert soil on which it is obtained, the only species it can procure are of a hard, dry texture; and it is supposed to be for the purpose of assisting nature in their digestion, that the bird will swallow pebbles, pieces of iron, or other mineral substances. Some have been disembowelled in whose stomach was found a collection so varied as to resemble a small curiosity shop or geological museum!

Stones have been taken out of the stomach of an ostrich, each weighing more than a pound avoirdupois!

When this great bird is going at full run—for of course it cannot fly—its stride is full twelve feet in length, and its rate

of speed not less [than twenty-five miles to the hour.

It cannot be overtaken by a horseman; and its capture is generally the result of some stratagem.

It always feeds on the open plain, where it can obtain an unobstructed view, and be warned in good time of the approach of an enemy.

It possesses a sharp vision; and, from the manner its eyes are set in its small, disproportioned head, held eight or ten feet above the surface of the ground, it can take in the whole circle of the horizon at a glance.

On this account the utmost caution is required in approaching it.

In one respect the book of Job has closely depicted nature in the description

of this bird, for "God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath He imparted to her understanding."

The ostrich is a stupid creature, and is often captured by taking advantage of its stupidity. Nature seems to have placed in its little head the belief that in running to the leeward, it will encounter some impassable barrier, and be overtaken by whatever pursues it.

Ostrich hunters are well acquainted with this peculiarity; and on approaching a flock, they always ride to the windward.

This manœuvre is observed by the birds, who believe that an attempt is being made to cut off their retreat in the only direction in which it can be successfully made.

They immediately start on a course which, if continued, must cross that taken

by the hunters. Owing to the greater distance it has to run, the latter often get near enough to bring the bird down with a shot.

Were the silly bird to retreat in the opposite direction, it would be perfectly safe from pursuit.

The feathers of the ostrich are beautifully adapted to the warm climate of the desert country it inhabits. They allow a free circulation of the air around its skin, while giving shade to its body. The white plumes of the male bring the greatest price, and sometimes sell for £12 the pound, troy weight.

The black feathers seldom fetch more than a fourth of that price.

Two species of ostrich are found on the great plains of South America, and one

other in Australia. None of these attain the gigantic proportions of the African, nor are their plumes at all comparable in beauty or value to those of the *Struthio Camelus*.

Ostriches were once a favourite article of food with the Romans, and it is stated that the brains of six hundred of these birds were consumed at one feast. The flesh is still eaten, but only by the native Africans.

The bird possesses great strength, and can run at a rapid rate with a man mounted on its back.

It was undoubtedly designed by the Creator for some other purpose than that of contributing to the gratification of man's vanity.

Ostriches are easily domesticated; that

is done to some extent by the Arabians, who breed and bring them up for the sake of the feathers, as also, to procure them as an article of food.

But the more enlightened people of the present day, make no other effort to ascertain their utility than to keep a pair or two of them shut up in a public garden, for children and their nurses to gaze at.

CHAPTER II.

ANOTHER DELAY.

NEXT morning the hunters were early in the saddle, and off for the karroo. For some distance they rode along the bank of the stream, which was fringed by a growth of willow trees.

This course was taken to get to windward of the ostriches, in the hope of having a shot at them, as they ran up the wind. Had their object been to stalk any other species of animal, they

would have advanced upon it from the leeward.

Before they had gone a great way over the karroo, five huge bipeds were seen about a mile away. They were ostriches.

They were apparently coming towards them with great speed, and the four hunters extended their line to cut off an advance, which the stupid bird mistakes for a retreat.

They were moving in long, rapid strides, and as they drew nearer, the hunters saw that, to obtain a good shot, they must gallop farther to the north.

The birds were going in a curved line, that would carry them away from the place where the hunters expected to have met them.

To get within sure range, they saw

that they would have a sharp ride for it; and their horses were instantly put to their full speed.

Though the ostriches appeared to be running in a straight line from the place whence they had started, such was not the case.

They were curving around, just sufficiently to avoid the hunters, and yet get to the windward of them.

Their pace being much faster than that of the horses, they succeeded in crossing the course pursued by the latter, about three hundred yards in advance of them.

Willem and Hendrick, hardly taking time to pull up, dismounted, and fired; but not with the desired result. The ostriches were at too great a distance, and ran on untouched.

Knowing that a stern chase after them would prove a failure, the hunters came to a stop.

Several other ostriches were afterwards seen, but, as on the open karroo, it was found impossible to approach them, and our adventurers were compelled to return to their camp without taking back a single feather !

Their want of success was a source of great gratification to Swartboy. He could kill ostriches afoot, while four white men, although well armed, and mounted on fast horses, had failed to do so.

The Bushman could not avoid making an exhibition of his conceit, and proceeded to inform his masters that if they were very anxious to obtain ostrich

feathers, he could easily put them in the way.

As none of the hunters were inclined to put Swartboy's abilities for ostrich hunting to a further test, they acknowledged their defeat, and resumed the interrupted journey.

After leaving the karroo, the hunters entered into a very beautiful and fertile country, possessed by small tribes of peaceful Bechuannas, who had long been allowed to remain undisturbed by their warlike neighbours—for the reason that they lived at a great distance from any hostile tribe.

It was a country Willem was reluctant to pass rapidly through; for, after leaving it behind, he knew there would be very little hope of again seeing giraffes.

Along the way, little groves of the kameel-doorn were occasionally seen, but, for all this, no camelopards.

At a village passed by them on the route, they were informed that giraffes sometimes visited the neighbourhood, and that there was no time of the year at which, with a little trouble, some of these animals might not be found within a day's distance.

This information Hendrick, Arend, and Hans heard rather with regret; they knew that it was likely to cause another' impediment to their homeward journey.

In this they were not deceived. Willem stoutly declared that he would proceed no further for the present; at the same time telling the others that, if they were im-

patient to reach Graaff-Reinet, they might go on without him.

This all three would willingly have done, had they dared. But they knew that, on reaching home, they would be unable to give any satisfactory explanation of their reason for deserting their companion.

People would inquire why they had not remained to assist the great hunter in his praiseworthy enterprise.

What answer could they give?

There was both honour and profit to be derived by delivering two young giraffes to the Dutch Consul, and they would not have been unwilling to share in both, if the thing could have been conveniently accomplished.

For all that, they would have preferred

returning home without further delay, but for the determination of Willem to remain.

The four Makalolo were also a little chafed at the delay. They were anxious to see something of the wonders of civilization, but their impatience was not openly expressed.

Before setting out, they had been instructed by Macora, in all things to be guided by Willem, and they had no intention of disobeying.

Congo was the only one who was wholly indifferent to the future. His home was with Groot Willem, and he seemed to have no more concern or remembrance about Graaff-Reinet than his dog Spoor'em.

Choosing a convenient place for their encampment, within a few miles of the Bechuanna village, the youths resolved to

stop for awhile and make a final effort at capturing the camelopards.

Should they succeed in finding these animals, yet fail in taking any of them alive, Groot Willem promised that he would make no further opposition to returning home.

As all knew that the promise would be faithfully kept, they consented to stay for a few days, without showing any signs of reluctance.

Crossing the country, with a general course to the south-west, ran a stream, along which was a belt of timber, or rather a series of disconnected copses. The trees were mostly mimosas. In every copse could be seen some trees with torn branches, and twigs cut off—an evidence that they had been browsed upon by camelopards, while

the spoor of these animals appeared in many places along the edge of the stream.

As the damage done to the mimosas, and the tracks in the mud, showed signs of having been recently made, our hunters came to the conclusion that giraffes could not be far off.

“Something whispers me,” said Willem, “that we shall succeed at last. I left home with the intention of never returning without two young giraffes; and I have not yet relinquished the hope of seeing Graaff-Reinet again. We will make no more pits; but let me once more get my eyes on a giraffe, and mark me, it is mine, if I have to run it down and capture it with my own hands.”

“That is not possible,” remarked Hendrick. “True, you might catch a wild

elephant, but what would you do with it, —or rather what would it do with you?"

"That question I shall take into serious consideration after I've caught my giraffe," answered Willem; "I can only say now, that if I meet with one, I'm not going to part with it alive—not if I have to exchange my horse for it."

* * * * *

Three days were passed in riding about the country, and during that time the hunters saw not a single giraffe.

In this respect they were more unfortunate than Swartboy and the Makalolo, who remained at the camp. On the evening of the third day, which the hunters had spent in beating some groves up the river, Swartboy reported, on their return, that two giraffes had passed within

sight of the camp. He described them as an aged couple, that had no doubt been often hunted.

To these ancient inhabitants of the mimosa forest the Bushman ascribed the spoor, and other signs of giraffes that had been seen.

He had compared the tracks of the animals that had trotted past the camp, with those on the banks of the stream, and he pronounced both to have been made by the same feet.

Swartboy further informed his young masters, that he could have captured the two animals he had seen, but did not, because they were old, and not worth the trouble.

If Hendrick, Arend, and Hans were inclined to place but little reliance on

this boast of the Bushman, they gave to the rest of his story more than a fair share of credence.

To them it was positive evidence that any longer stay in the neighbourhood would be simply waste of time.

Willem saw that they were once more inclined to defeat his plans, but it only strengthened him in his resolution to continue a little longer in the place.

Each of the four had a cherished project he was anxious to see fulfilled. Willem's wish was to obtain two young giraffes; and his three companions found that there was no chance of him relinquishing his design—at least not for many days.

Two more days were passed upon the spot, and then our adventurers, who,

though young in years, were old in friendship, came very near parting company.

At this crisis a spectacle was presented to their eyes, that had the happy effect of once more uniting them for a common purpose.

CHAPTER III.

A HOPELESS CHASE.

WHILE the hunters were at breakfast, they were startled by the dull, heavy sound of footfalls and the yelping of wild dogs.

A quarter of a mile to the eastward, they saw approaching them a large drove of springboks, accompanied by a band of giraffes!

More than a hundred of the antelopes, and between twenty and thirty

camelopards, were flying before a few wilde honden.

The wild hounds of South Africa hunt in packs, and proceed upon a well-organized plan.

The whole pack is never engaged in running upon the view. Some remain in reserve, and, guided by the voices of those that are running, frequently save space by cutting off angles. This they can do whenever the chase is not made in a straight line.

In this manner they relieve each other, and the pursuit is continued until the game becomes exhausted, and is easily overtaken.

The perseverance, energy, and cunning displayed by these animals, is something wonderful. They do not commence a

hunt until driven to it by hunger ; and then it is often carried on for many hours, their tenacity of purpose being shown by their continuing the chase till their victim falls down before them.

They were in full run after the springboks ; and one of those animals was sure to reward their skill and labour by affording them a dinner.

The giraffes were foolish enough to think or act as though the wilde honden were hunting them ; and, in place of remaining still and permitting the dogs to pass, or turning to one side, the foolish creatures ran on with the springboks. At the time they came up with the hunters, they were already exhibiting signs of distress. To Groot Willem it was a

gratifying sight. A herd of giraffes was at hand, some of which were evidently young ones. Three of them he observed were apparently but a few weeks old.

The very things for which he had travelled so far, were now before his eyes — apparently coming to deliver themselves up !

It was not until the springboks swerved to the right, to avoid the horsemen, that these little animals became separated from the giraffes. The latter continued on along the edge of the stream, while the former, pursued by the wild dogs, made off towards some hills to the north.

The speed of the camelopard is not quite equal to that of a horse, and the hunters knew that the desired object could

be overtaken. But what then? The giraffes might be shot down, but how were they to be taken alive?

There was no time for reflection. The necessity of commencing the chase, and the excitement of following it up, occupied all the time of the hunters.

After a sharp run of about two miles, the camelopards began to show further signs of distress. Already exhausted by their flight before the hounds, and now pursued by fresh horses, their utmost efforts did not save them from being overtaken. After a two miles' chase, our hunters were riding upon their heels.

A portion of the herd, becoming separated from the rest, turned away from the bank of the stream. There were but three

who went thus, a male and female, followed by a young one—a beautiful creature. Groot Willem gazed longingly upon it as he galloped by its side, and became nearly mad with the desire to secure it.

The pace of the three had now changed from a gallop to a trot, in which their feet were lifted but a few inches from the ground, and drawn forward in an awkward, shambling manner, that proved them to be tired out with their long run.

Still they ran on at a pace that kept Willem's horse at a sharp canter. In a short time he had got out of sight both of the minor herd and his comrades. Nothing could be seen of either. He might have reflected that there was some chance of losing himself; but he did not. All his

thoughts were given to the capture of the young giraffe.

Slower and more slow became the pace both of pursuer and pursued; the horse streaming with sweat, and nearly ready to drop in his tracks.

“Why should I follow them farther?” thought Willem; “why should I kill my horse for the sake of gazing a little longer on a creature I cannot take?”

Though conscious of the folly he was committing, Willem could not bring himself to abandon the chase.

By his side trotted the young giraffe,—beautiful in colour, graceful in form, and, to his mind, priceless in value. But how was it to become his? The coveted prize, although apparently but a few weeks old, and quite fatigued by its long race, was

still able to defy any efforts he might make to check its laboured flight.

He was now more than a mile from the river, and his horse was tottering under him—nearly exhausted by its long exertions. What should he do?

Stop, give his horse a rest, and then return to his companions.

This was the command of common sense; but he was not guided by that. For the time, he was insane with excitement, anxiety, and despair.

He was mad, and acted like a madman. The hopes and aspirations he had for months been indulging in, were concentrated into the hour; and in that hour he could not yield them up. He was too much excited to reason calmly or clearly.

A little extra exertion on the part of his horse might place him in advance of the three giraffes, and he might drive them back to the river.

“Yes,” exclaimed he, nearly frantic with the idea of losing what seemed so nearly gained, “if I cannot catch this young giraffe, I can drive it. I’ll drive it to Graaff-Reinet. It shall not escape me !”

Plunging his spurs into the foam-covered flanks of his horse, he sprang forward in advance of the three giraffes; and, as he expected, they came to a halt.

Pulling up, he wheeled round facing them, while the two old giraffes turned at the same time, and made off in the back direction.

As they did so, one of them came in contact with the tottering calf, that for a

second or so 'seemed to become entangled between its legs; and at their separation, the young one staggered a pace or two and fell heavily upon the earth.

CHAPTER IV.

A WEARY WATCH.

THROWING himself out of his saddle, Willem seized the fallen creature, and hindered it from rising by keeping its head close pressed against the ground. This was easily done; for the long, slender neck of the animal, without much muscular strength, gave him a good chance of holding it down. The weight of the huge hunter's body was sufficient for that, without any exertion of his strength.

Meanwhile the two old ones continued their flight, while Willem's horse, relieved of his load, proceeded to refresh himself by browsing upon the dry herbage that grew near.

Willem had obtained what he wanted—a young giraffe. It was actually in his possession!

He was holding it under perfect control; and yet it appeared to him that he was nearly as far as ever from the realization of his hopes!

Now that he had got the giraffe, all he could do was to keep it on the spot where it had fallen. The instant its head might be released from his hold, it would spring to its feet again and escape, in spite of all his efforts to retain it.

He could not allow it to go thus. He

had hoped too wildly, travelled too far, and waited too long for that.

The fear that he would still have to surrender his prize, or destroy it, was to him a painful thought, and it was only relieved by the hope that in time he might be joined by his companions. They might discover the spoor of his horse, and come to him. In that case, there would be no difficulty. The giraffe could then be secured with rheims, and become their travelling companion for the rest of the journey to Graaff-Reinet. About their coming there was much uncertainty—at least, their coming in time.

They would wait for his return, perhaps, until the next morning, before starting out in search of him. Before their arrival, the young giraffe would kill itself with the

violent exertions it still continued to make. It was kicking and struggling as if it wanted to leap out of its skin. Such terrible throes could not fail to injure it.

Willem was himself suffering from thirst. A long afternoon was before him : it would be followed by a long night,—one in which the lion, that prowling tyrant of the African plains, would be seeking his supper.

Would the hunter be allowed to retain possession of his prize ?

His steed—the faithful creature that had carried him through so many perils—was wandering away from his sight.

The horse, too, might stray beyond the chance of being found again !

He might be devoured by wild beasts !

The horse could still be recovered: would it not be better to abandon the giraffe, and endeavour to get back to his companions?

By remaining where he was, he might lose all three—his horse, his prize, and his own life.

What was best to be done?

The young hunter was never more perplexed in his life. He was in an agony of doubt and uncertainty. Streams of perspiration were pouring down his cheeks, and his throat felt as if on fire.

Slowly he saw the horse strolling away, until he was almost beyond the reach of his vision, and yet could not bring himself to a determination as to what should be done. He had travelled fifteen hundred miles to capture two such creatures as the

one now underneath him. He had seized upon one; and if his companions had done their duty, they might have taken another.

This thought counselled him to hold on to the captured giraffe; and he saw the horse disappear over a swell of the plain, just as the sun sank down below the horizon.

For a long time the giraffe struggled wildly to release itself. Then it remained quiet for awhile, not as if it had given up the intention to escape, but as if reflecting on some plan to free itself.

Again it would recommence its struggles, and again rest awhile, as though gathering strength for a fresh effort.

Gradually it grew somewhat resigned to its position, and seemed to breathe more

tranquilly, while its exertions were less frequent and more feeble. It had learnt that it could remain in the presence of man without meeting death. It had become familiar with his company, and conscious of its own inability to part from it while man opposed its efforts.

Night came down, and found Willem still seated by the side of the giraffe—with his arms around its neck. He had the satisfaction of thinking that his companions would now be uneasy at his absence.

He felt sure that within a few hours Congo and Spoor'em would be upon his track, with the others following; and when all should arrive, the young giraffe would be secured.

The prospect of such a termination to

his adventure did much to make him disregard the agony he was enduring.

He soon discovered he was not to be left alone in his vigil; nor was his right to his prize to be left undisputed.

His first visitors were hyenas; but their laughter—apparently put forth at seeing him in his ludicrous position—did not induce him to abandon it; and the fierce brutes circled round him, smiling and showing their teeth to no purpose. They were too cowardly to attempt an attack; and their efforts to frighten him were more amusing than otherwise.

Soon after sunset the night became very dark—so dark that, although the hyenas approached within a few paces, nothing could be seen of them except their shining eyes.

It was just such a night as lions select for going in search of prey—so dark that the king of beasts can move about unseen; and while thus protected by invisibility, will pounce upon a man with as much confidence as he will upon a springbok.

As Willem was trying to while away the time by hopeful thoughts, the air was shaken around him by a noise which he knew to be the roar of a lion.

One was abroad seeking blood.

The clouds that had been for some time rolling up from the south-west, became black at the instant, and seemed separated by streams of fire; while the low murmurings of distant thunder could be heard far off in the sky.

These were signs that could not be

mistaken. A tropical storm was approaching.

The voice of the lion told that he was doing the same. Every moment it could be heard nearer, and more intensely terrifying.

Which of them would come first—the storm, or the beast of prey?

It seemed a question between them. Already heavy rain-drops were plashing round him. Thirsting as he was, this would have been a welcome sound, but for that other that proceeded from the throat of the lion.

The hunter's familiarity with the habits of "the great cat" gave him a good idea of how he might expect the latter to approach him.

There would be a simultaneous bound

and roar, followed by the mangling of a body and the crunching of bones, which he could hardly doubt would be his own.

Willem was not often tortured by fear, though at that moment he was not free from apprehension. Still, he awaited the event with calmness. Most people, when frightened, feel an irresistible desire to make a sudden departure from the place where they have been seized with the malady; but this was not the case with Groot Willem.

He had the sense to know that, by making a move, he might run into the jaws of the very danger he wished to avoid: for the roar of the lion is no guide to the direction the animal may be in. Besides, he was not yet so badly scared as to think of

abandoning the prize he had taken so much trouble to retain.

The rain now came down, and for some time continued to fall in torrents.

Brief periods of darkness were followed by gleams of electric light, dazzling in its brilliancy.

In a few minutes the fiercest of the storm appeared to be over; and then, as a wind-up to it, there came a long-continued blaze of lightning, more brilliant than ever, and a peal of thunder louder than any that had preceded it.

By that flash Willem was nearly blinded. The electric shock seemed to strike every nerve in his body; and had he been standing erect, he certainly would have fallen to the ground.

The instant after, so intensely black was

all around, that he might well have thought for a moment or two that the flash had destroyed his power of vision; but there was another thought on his mind, more terrible than this.

When the heavens and earth were illumined by that flash, he had obtained a momentary glimpse of an object that drove from his mind every thought but that of immediate death.

There was a lion within ten feet of him, just crouching for a spring! Willem would have rushed out of the way, and, abandoning the giraffe, fled far from the spot.

This was his first instinct, but unfortunately he was unable to yield to it.

Prostrated, body and soul, by the electric fluid, that had struck the earth within a

few feet of him, for a time he was unable to stir.

The first distinct thought that came into his mind was astonishment at finding the minute after that the claws of the lion were not buried in his flesh !

The blow that had stunned him was not from the paw of the lion, but the lightning. It had saved his life, as the king of beasts, scorched and terrified by the shock, had retreated on the same instant.

The storm soon passed over, and a small patch of clear sky appeared opening up on the western horizon. It was soon after occupied by the disc of a silvery moon, under whose soft light Willem continued his vigil, without further interruption from either lion or hyenas.

The giraffe was still alive, and lying

quietly upon the ground; but from its long and laboured respiration, Willem began to fear it might die before he would have the chance to release it from the irksome attitude in which he felt bound to retain it.

CHAPTER V.

CHANCE BETTER THAN SKILL.

THE camelopards, followed by Hans, Hendrick, and Arend, had continued up the bank of the stream; and being the main body of the herd, were pursued without the hunters having noticed the defection of Willem.

With such noble game in view, and in hot pursuit of it, these three youths were as much excited as Groot Willem himself. Full of ardour, they pressed on.

Their horses were spurred to such a speed as soon brought them close upon the heels of the flying game. It was only then that Willem was observed to have parted from them. He was seen half a mile off, and fast increasing the distance. He was heading northward. This discovery scarce caused them a thought. Each was too much interested in his own chase to think of the others. They soon closed in upon the giraffes, which had been driven into a sharp bend of the river.

The hunted animals, on perceiving the obstruction, turned back, but found their retreat cut off. The pursuers were coming on behind them. Arend, who was to the right of the others, was just in time to prevent the giraffes from escaping with

dry hoofs—by riding rapidly in advance of his companions.

The herd was again headed towards the river.

In forcing them round, Arend was placed within a few yards of the largest. The instinctive desire to bring down such a grand creature, could not be resisted; and without bringing his horse to a stand, he placed the barrel of his rifle on a line with the camelopard's head, and fired.

Skill, or rather chance, favoured him; and the giraffe dropped to the shot. Though a gigantic creature, standing sixteen feet in height, the one small bullet, scarce bigger than a pea, was all that was necessary to bring its towering form to the ground.

It had been hit on the side of the head, just behind the eye; and as it received the

shot, it raised its fore-feet from the ground, spun round as on a pivot, and then fell heavily on its side.

As though desirous of putting as speedy an end as possible to its sufferings, directly it was down, it commenced beating the ground violently with its shattered head.

The remaining giraffes were driven on toward the stream; where, seeing no other way of avoiding the enemy that pursued them, they plunged into the water. The stream was neither broad nor deep, yet was it one that could not conveniently be crossed at that particular spot. The bank on both sides rose several feet above the water; and from the way in which the animals were wading across, it was evident they were going upon a soft bottom.

Not until several of them had reached the opposite shore, and made an ineffectual attempt to get out of the channel, did our hunters have any hope of capturing one of the young giraffes. Hitherto, they had not thought of being able to take them alive. They had entered upon the chase solely for the excitement, and for the destroying of animal life; but on seeing the camelopards struggling in the stream, they became animated with the same hope that was inspiring Groot Willem about the same time, but on a far distant part of the plain.

“They can’t get up the bank,” shouted Hendrick; “and there are two young ones among them. Let us try and get hold of them!”

To carry out Hendrick’s proposal, but

little time was lost in arranging a plan. It was instantly decided that they should separate, and one try to reach the other side of the stream. This task was assigned to Hendrick. Riding beyond the bend of the river, he reached a place where the banks were shelving, and dashing in, he soon gained the opposite shore.

A part of the equipment of each horse ridden by the hunters, was a long rheim, made of buffalo hide, and used for the purpose of tethering their animals when upon the grass. At one end of his rheim Hendrick had a loop, such as is used in the lazos of Spanish America. This was the means he intended to make use of for capturing the young giraffes. On riding opposite to them, he found them still in the water.

Wearied by their late run, they were standing quietly, apparently too much exhausted to raise their feet out of the soft ooze in which they were sinking deeper and deeper.

Two or three of the stronger ones alone continued their struggle to regain the shore, though not one of the drove seemed to think of making escape by moving up or down the stream. They were deterred from this by the presence of Hans and Arend, who had placed themselves on projecting points of the bank, above and below.

The appearance of Hendrick directly in front of them, caused a change in their attitude. Led by a large male, they commenced plunging about, as if determined to make a break up stream.

But Arend, who was in that quarter, had only a few paces to go before again appearing to be directly ahead of them; and this brought them a second time to a stand.

After a short pause, and a good deal of violent plunging, they now turned down stream, in hopes of escaping that way.

So sharp was the bend of the river, that Hans, who guarded there, was able to show himself, as if right in front of them; and by loud shouting, he once more brought them to bay.

As a further encouragement to the hunters to continue the attempt at capturing the young giraffes, they noticed that these made but slight efforts to escape. The mud at the bottom was

too stiff for the strength of their slender limbs.

In the narrow stream, they were unable to get out of reach of the rheims, which all three of the hunters had now detached from their saddles, and were looking out for an opportunity to use.

In their efforts to avoid their enemies, the frightened camelopards now rushed to and fro, wearily dragging their feet from the mud, until they were hardly able to move.

Hendrick, who was nearest, after two or three ineffectual trials, at length succeeded in throwing his snare over the head of one of the young ones. As soon as he had done so, he leaped out of his saddle, and made fast ^{to} the other end of his rheim to a tree.

There was no chance for the giraffe to break away after that.

However strong it might be in the body, its long, slender neck was too feeble to aid it in a violent effort; and it soon submitted to its confinement.

“Try and catch the other!” exclaimed Hendrick to his companions, pointing to the second of the young giraffes. “Make haste, and you will have it. See! it’s stuck in the mud. Quick with your rheim, Hans,—quick!”

In a second or two, Hans, obeying the call, succeeded in throwing his snare; and the second of the young giraffes became a captive.

As this was all that was wanted, the rest of the herd received no further attention,—the hunters being wholly occupied

with the care of the two they had taken.

Left free, the crowd of camelopards once more made a break to get off down stream.

In their struggle to escape, one of the young—that captured by Hendrick—was borne down, and trampled under the water.

It was not carried off. The rope still retained it; but although it remained in the hands of its captors, it was only in the shape of a carcass. It was partly drowned by its head being carried under water, and partly choked by the noose having tightened around its neck.

As soon as the herd had gone off, the three hunters turned their attention to the captive that had been taken alive.

It was first fairly secured, so as to

prevent the loop from slipping, and then carefully led out of the stream.

For some time it struggled to get free; but, as if convinced that its efforts would be idle, it soon desisted.

Exhausted with the long race, as well as by its subsequent exertions in the water, it was the more easily subdued.

Our three hunters were in ecstasies. They had now obtained one young giraffe, and there was a possibility of their procuring another.

The feat of capturing these creatures, which had baffled so many hunters, was proved not to be impossible. After all, Groot Willem had not been like a child crying for the moon. He had hoped for nothing more than might be accomplished.

The welfare of their captive was now

their greatest care; and to give it an opportunity of recovering from its fright, as also to get it a little better acquainted with its new companions, they resolved to allow it an hour's rest, before returning to the camp.

The young giraffe was too much exhausted to make any further effort at freeing itself.

With the mild and gentle character of the camel, and nothing of the leopard in its nature, the giraffe soon became resigned to captivity.

CHAPTER VI.

A REVERSE OF FORTUNE.

HAVING given their captive the desired rest, during which it had displayed its good sense by remaining most of the time in quiet, the hunters prepared to drive it to their camp.

Mounted on their horses, Arend and Hans each took the end of a rheim, which was fastened midway to its neck. They intended to ride a little in advance of the captive, keeping also some distance apart from each other.

This would hinder it from turning either to the right or left.

Hendrick was to come on behind, and urge the creature forward, should it show any disposition to try the strength of its neck by hanging back upon the rheims.

This plan worked extremely well.

The young captive was compelled to follow the two horsemen in an undeviating line; and every attempt made to remain stationary, or go backwards, was rewarded by a blow from Hendrick's jambok; then the strain on the ropes would be instantly relieved by the animal springing forward.

In this manner the creature was conducted along without the slightest trouble, and near the middle of the afternoon, they reached the place from which they had started out on the hunt.

On the ground they discovered their pack-saddles, cooking utensils, and other *impedimenta*; but nothing was seen of Congo, Swartboy, the four Makalolo, or the cattle! All were away! Moreover, they had hopes of meeting Groot Willem on their return, and were anticipating great pleasure from the encounter. They knew how rejoiced he would be at their success.

But where were the camp followers?

Where were Swartboy and Congo?

There was a mystery in *their* absence, that none of the three hunters could solve.

Why had their property been left exposed by those placed in charge of it? Could the Makalolo have robbed them of their cattle? Had Congo and Swartboy proved traitors? This was very improbable; but why were they not there?

For some time our adventurers could do nothing but wait, in the hope that time would explain all, and bring the absentees back.

Not an ox, horse, or dog was to be seen.

The bundles of ivory, enveloped in grass matting, were lying where they had been left in the morning. If a robbery had been committed, why was this valuable property left untouched?

As no one could make answer, the solution had to be left to time.

Evening came on and the three hunters were still distracted by conflicting hopes, fears, and doubts. The prolonged absence of Willem now began to cause them serious apprehension. It was time something should be done towards finding him; but what were they to do? Where should

they seek? They knew not: still they should go somewhere.

As night approached, leaving Hans to take care of the young giraffe, Hendrick and Arend started off in the direction in which Willem had last been seen.

The twilight was fast disappearing before they had proceeded a mile from the camp; but under its dim light they perceived Congo and Swartboy coming towards them. They were accompanied only by the dogs.

The two hunters hastened forward, and soon came up with them. Hendrick commenced hastily questioning the Bushman, while Arend did the same to the Kaffir, in the endeavour to get some information of what had so much mystified them.

The questions, "Where is Willem? Where are the cattle? Why did you leave

the camp? Where are the Makalolo?" were put in rapid succession; and to all they received but one answer,—the word "yaas."

"Will you not tell me, you yellow demon?" shouted Hendrick, impatient at not getting the answer he wished.

"Yaas, baas Hendrick," answered Swartboy. "What you want to know first?"

"Where is Willem?"

That was a question that, in the Bushman's way of thinking, required some consideration before he could venture on a reply; but while he was hesitating, Congo answered, "We don't know."

"Ha, ha! Congo's a fool!" exclaimed Swartboy. "We saw baas Willem go away with the rest of you this morning after the torkas."

It was not until the youths were driven nearly wild with impatience, that they succeeded in learning what they wished.

Willem had not returned, and the two Africans knew less about the cause of his absence than they did themselves. During the day, the cattle in feeding had strayed to some distance over the plain. The four Makalolo had gone after them, and had not returned. Swartboy and Congo admitted that they had slept awhile in the afternoon ; and only on awakening had discovered that the cattle and Makalolo were missing. They had then started out in search of both. They had found the ambassadors of Macora in great trouble. A party of Bechuannas had come upon them, and taken from them the whole of the cattle !

The Makalolo were in great distress about the affair ; and fearing that they would be blamed for the loss of the cattle, were afraid to return to the camp of the hunters. They were then halted about two miles down the river, and were talking of going back to their home, quite certain that the white hunters would have nothing more to do with them.

The folly of having left their property unprotected, when in the neighbourhood of African tribes whose honesty could not be relied on, now for the first time occurred to our adventurers. The Bechuannas, who will steal from each other, or from the people of any native tribe, in all probability would not have taken the cattle had one of the whites been present to claim ownership in them.

The Bechuanna robbers had found them in possession of only four strange men—Africans who belonged far north, and had no right to be within Bechuanna territory. The opportunity was too good to be lost; and so tempted, they had driven the animals away.

There could be no help for what had happened — at all events, not for the present. To discover the whereabouts of Willem was the case that was most pressing; and they once more proceeded in search of him.

As the night had now come on, they could have done nothing by themselves; but the presence of Congo, accompanied by his hound Spoor'em, inspired them with fresh hope, and they proceeded onward.

After a time it became so dark that

Arend proposed a halt until morning. To this Hendrick objected, Congo taking sides with him.

“Do you remember the night you were under the baobab tree, dodging borelé?” asked Hendrick.

“Say no more,” answered Arend. “If you wish it, I am ready to go on.”

Swartboy was sent back to the camp to join Hans, while the Kaffir and Spoor'em led the way. Under the direction of Hendrick, they soon came to the place where Willem had been last seen.

There was no sign of him anywhere. The joy with which they had returned to their camp had now departed.

Something unusual had happened to their companion—something disastrous.

Their cattle and pack-horses were lost

—driven away they knew not whither, by a tribe that might be able to retain them, even should they be found.

Under these circumstances, what cared they any longer for the captured giraffe?

Such were the reveries of Hendrick and Arend as they followed their Kaffir guide through the gloom of the night.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SEARCH FOR WILLEM.

To all appearance Congo had some secret method of communicating to the dog Spoor'em what was required of him. The animal ran to the right and left, keeping a little in the advance, and with its muzzle close down to the surface, as if searching for a spoor. Most of the time it was out of sight, hidden by the darkness; but every now and then it would flit like a shadow across their track, and they could

hear an occasional sniff as it lifted the scent from the ground.

They had not proceeded more than half a mile in this manner, when Spoor'em expressed a more decided opinion of something that interested him, by giving utterance to a short, sharp bark.

“He's found the spoor!” exclaimed Congo, hastening forward. “I told 'im do that, and I knowed he would!”

They were all soon up with the dog, which kept moving forward at a slow trot, occasionally lowering its snout to the grass, as though to make sure against going astray. Unlike most other hounds, Spoor'em would follow a track without rushing forward on the scent, and leaving the hunters behind.

Arend and Hendrick knew this, though

still uncertain about being on the traces of Groot Willem.

The night was so dark they could not distinguish footmarks, and they had not the slightest evidence of their own for believing that they were on the tracks of Willem's horse.

"How do you know that we are going right, Congo?" asked Hendrick.

"We follow Spoor'em. He know it," answered the Kaffir. "He find anything that go over the grass."

"But can you be sure that he is following the spoor of Willem's horse?"

"Yaas, massa Hendrick, very sure of it. Spoor'em no fool. He know well what we want."

With blind confidence in the sagacity of both the Kaffir and his dog, the two hunters

rode on at a gentle trot, taking more than an hour to travel the same distance that Willem had got over in a few minutes.

There was a prospect that the trail they were following might conduct them back to the camp, and that there would be found the man they were in search of. Willem would be certain not to return over the same ground where he had pursued the giraffes, and they might be spending the night upon his tracks, while he was waiting for them at the camp.

This thought suggested a return.

Another consideration might have counselled them to it. A thunder-storm was threatening, and the difficulties of their search would be greatly increased.

But all inclinations to go back were subdued by the reflection that possibly Willem

might be in danger, and in need of their assistance; and with this thought they determined to go on.

The dog was now urged forward at a greater speed. The storm was rapidly approaching, and they knew that after the ground had been saturated by a fall of rain, the scent would be less easily taken up, and then tracking might be brought to an end.

The elements soon after opened upon them; but still they kept on in the midst of the pelting rain, consoling themselves for what was disagreeable by the reflection that they were performing their duty to their lost friend.

It was not until the thunder-shower had passed over, that Spoor'em began to show some doubt as to the course he was

pursuing. The heavy rain had not only destroyed the scent, but the traces of the footmarks, and the dog was no longer able to make them out. For the last half hour they had been moving through an atmosphere dark as Erebus itself.

They had been unable to see each other, except when the universe seemed illumined by the flashes of lightning.

The night had now become clear. The moon had made her appearance in the western sky, and the search might have been continued with less difficulty than before, but for the obliteration of the spoor.

The dog seemed bewildered, and ran about in short, broken circles, as though quite frantic at the thought of having lost one of the most important of his senses.

“We shall have to return at last,” said Hendrick, despairingly; “we can do nothing more to-night.”

They were about to act according to this advice, when the loud roar of a lion was heard about half a mile off, and in the direction from which they had just ridden. In going back that way they might encounter the fierce creature.

“I have kept the lock of my rifle as dry as possible,” said Arend, “but it may not be safe to trust it. I think I shall reload.”

Drawing the rifle out of the piece of leopard-skin with which the lock had been covered, Arend pointed the muzzle upward, and pulled the trigger. The gun went off.

As the report died away in the distance, the far-off sound of a human voice could be heard, as if shouted back in

answer to the shot. What they had heard was the word "Hilloo!"

They hastened in the direction whence the sound seemed to proceed. Even the dog appeared suddenly relieved from its perplexity, and led the way. In less than ten minutes they were standing around Willem, delighted at finding him in safety, and in the possession of a live giraffe.

"How long have you been here?" asked Hendrick, after the first moments of their joyful greeting had passed.

"Ever since noon," was Willem's reply.

"And how much longer would you have staid, had we not found you?"

"Until either this giraffe or *I* should have died," answered Willem. "I should not have abandoned it before."

"But supposing you had died first,

how would it have been then?" asked Arend.

"No doubt," replied Willem, "something would very soon have taken me away. But why don't you take my place here—one of you? I must stretch my legs, or I shall never be able to stand upright again."

Hendrick placed his hands on the head of the giraffe, and Willem with some difficulty arose, and after walking around the prostrate animal, declared that he had never been happy until that moment!

It was decided that they should not attempt to stir from the place until morning; and the rest of the night—with the exception of an hour or two devoted to sleep—was passed in asking questions and giving explanations.

Willem was a little woeful about the loss of his riding-horse, and also on learning of the robbery of the cattle; but these misfortunes could not entirely counteract the joy he felt at having taken the young giraffe.

“This creature is quite tame now,” said he; “and if I cannot find my horse again, I shall ride it to Graaff-Reinet. Before I do that, however, I shall use it in catching another. I must and will have two; and we can easily find another chance. You and Hans ought to be ashamed of yourselves. The three of you have not done so well as I. You have allowed two or more young giraffes to escape; while I, single-handed, captured all the young that were in the herd I followed!”

Arend and Hendrick glanced signifi-

cantly at one another, while Congo stared at both of them. A shake of the head given by Hendrick was understood by the two who were in the secret—for Congo had been told of the capture of the second giraffe,—and of course not a word was said to Willem of that affair. His companions preferred giving him a surprise.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ENCOUNTER BETWEEN OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

WHEN morning dawned, the first thought of the hunters was to contrive some plan for getting the young giraffe to the camp.

Willem expressed surprise at his companions having come out without their rheims. The reason given by Hendrick for their having done so was that they did not think they would require them

—besides, they had left the camp in a hurry.

They did not anticipate much difficulty in taking back the giraffe. It appeared so weak and submissive, that their only fear was of its not being able to make the journey. For all that, without ropes or lines to lead it with, there might be difficulty enough. It might take a notion to resist, or get clear of their clutches.

“I must have a line of some kind,” said Willem, “even if I have to cut a thong from the hide of one of your horses. I have been standing, or rather sitting, sentry over this creature too long, and have travelled too far for the sake of finding it, to allow any chance of its escaping now. It is but half what we

want; and if any of you had been worthy of the name of hunter, you would have taken the other half."

A few hundred yards from the spot grew a copse of young trees—slender saplings they were, forming a miniature forest, such as one would like to see when in search of a fishing-rod.

Going to this grove, Willem selected out of it two long poles, each having a fork at the end. One of these was placed on each side of the captured giraffe, in such a manner that the forked ends embraced its neck, and when so tied by twisting the twigs together, formed a kind of neck-halter.

By this means the creature could be led along, one going on each side of it.

Arend grasped the end of one of the poles, Hendrick took the other.

So long had the young camelopard been kept in a prostrate position, that it was with some difficulty it managed to get on its feet ; and after doing so, its efforts to escape were feeble and easily defeated.

At each attempt to turn to one side, its head was instantly hauled to the other ; and it soon discovered that it was no less a captive on its feet than when fast confined in the recumbent attitude. Finding its struggles ineffectual, it soon discontinued them, and resigned itself to the will of its captors.

Mounting their horses, Hendrick and Arend held the poles by which the giraffe was to be guided ; while Willem and

Congo walked on behind. In this manner the captive was conducted towards the camp.

More than once during their journey Willem reiterated the reproach already made to his companions. If they had only shewn as much energy and determination as he had done, they might now have been ready to take the road for Graaff-Reinet, with a triumphant prospect before them!

“I would have followed this giraffe,” said he, “until my horse fell dead; and then I would have followed it on foot until it became mine. I had determined not to be defeated, and survive the defeat. Ah! had any of you three shewn a particle of the same resolution, we might have abandoned our cattle with pleasure, and

started on a straight line for home by daybreak to-morrow morning."

Arend and Hendrick allowed the elated hunter to continue his reproaches uninterrupted. They were quite satisfied with their own conduct; and each had the delicacy to refrain from telling Willem that, without their assistance, his capture of the young giraffe would only have resulted in the misfortune of his losing his horse, and suffering many other inconveniences.

They knew that Willem, when free from the intoxication caused by the partial fulfilment of a long-cherished design, would not claim any greater share in the credit of the expedition than he was really entitled to. Moreover, his joy at having captured the giraffe was some-

what damped by the fear that his horse had gone off for good. He was confident that, should he again get possession of him, another giraffe could be taken. With the herd that had been hunted, he had seen two other young ones. They might be found a second time; but there would be a difficulty in running them down, unless he was once more on the back of his tried steed.

By noon the camp was reached; when about the first thing that came under the eyes of Groot Willem was a young giraffe standing tied to a tree! Beside it was his own horse!

The horse had been brought back by the Makalolo, who found him straying over the plain, as they were themselves returning to the camp. The presence

both of the horse and the Makalolo was at once explained. Their original intention to visit the country of the white men had been abandoned by them, on account of the loss of their cattle. Without these they had no means of making the long journey that still lay before them. There seemed nothing for them but to go back to their own home—to Macora.

But they were unwilling to set off without taking leave of their late travelling companions; and as they were at the same time afraid of being blamed for the loss of the white hunters' cattle, as well as their own, they passed the night in great distress, uncertain as to what they should do.

Just as morning dawned, they descried

Willem's horse, grazing close to the spot where they were encamped.

They had last seen the great hunter on this horse's back, going in pursuit of the giraffes; and they were anxious to learn why the animal was now separated from its rider. They knew that it was greatly prized by its owner; and they believed that by taking it back to him, they would be forgiven for their neglect. In this they were not mistaken.

About the other animal—the young giraffe that stood tied to a tree—Groot Willem neither asked nor received any explanation. He held his tongue about that. He had been over thirty hours without tasting food; and now, without uttering another word, he set to work upon a dinner that Swartboy had cooked for him; and

after shewing that his discomfiture had not robbed him of his appetite, he stretched himself along the grass, and fell into a sound sleep.

The hunters had now but one more task to perform, before taking the direct route towards Graaff-Reinet.

They must make an effort to recover the horses and cattle of which they had been despoiled.

The sooner this work should be commenced, the better the prospect of success ; but Groot Willem, on being awakened and consulted, declared that he would do nothing but sleep for the next twelve hours, and saying this, he once more sank into a snoring slumber.

As the others could take no important step without him, they were compelled to

leave the matter over, till such time as the great hunter should awake, which was not before breakfast-time on the following day.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LOST ARE FOUND.

AFTER breakfast had been eaten, it was proposed to start off in search of the stolen property. Groot Willem, not without reluctance, was prevailed upon to accompany the others. He was loth to part, even for a few hours, with the captives he prized so highly.

His wildest dreams had been realized. Two young giraffes had been taken, and were gradually getting tamed. He could

caress them. They could be conducted with but little trouble to the colony of Graaff-Reinet, thence delivered to the Dutch Consul, and both money and fame would be the reward.

Since returning to the camp and seeing the second giraffe, his companions had heard no more boasting about his own prowess, nor reproaches for their negligence.

But now came the question of the ivory and other articles still lying in the camp.

With such a large quantity of valuable property to transport to the settlements, the pack-horses and cattle were worth making an effort to recover; so leaving Hans with Swartboy and two of the Makalolo to guard the camp, the others

started off, with the intention to seek, and, if possible, find them. Believing that the tribe of Bechuannas that had taken them would be found living somewhere near a stream of water, they resolved, first, to proceed down the river on which they had their camp; and in this direction they set off.

For the first five miles nothing could be seen of the spoor of either horses or cattle. But the ground was hard and dry, and even if cattle had been driven over it, it would have been impossible to take their spoor. It had rained heavily, and that would do something to obliterate any tracks that might have been made.

Soon they came to a place where the river bank was low and marshy, and

this they examined with care. They saw the hoof-marks of many animals that had quenched their thirst at the stream — all plainly impressed upon the soft earth.

To their joy they perceived amongst them the tracks of horses and cattle, and easily recognized them as those of the animals they had lost. Beyond doubt, they had been driven over the river at that point. Rejoiced at such a good beginning, they continued on more hopefully. They were now sure that they had come in the right direction—the spoor still led down the banks of the stream.

Three or four miles further on, they came within sight of a kraal containing about forty huts. As they drew near, several men ran forward to meet

them, and instantly demanded their business.

Swartboy informed them that they were looking after some stolen horses and cattle.

A tall, naked man, carrying a huge parasol of ostrich feathers, acted as spokesman for the villagers. In reply to Swartboy, he stated that he knew what cattle were; that he had often seen such animals, but *not lately*.

He had never seen any horses, and knew not what sort of animals they were.

As it chanced, the rain that had fallen upon the preceding night had so softened the ground, that all footmarks made since could be distinguished without the slightest difficulty.

It was evident that the man with the

parasol had not thought of this; for our adventurers at once saw that he was telling them a story. They had proofs of it by the sight of several horse-tracks with which the ground was indented around the spot where they had halted. They were so fresh as to show that horses must have been there but an hour ago; and it was not likely they could have been on that ground without being seen by the villagers and their chief.

Without saying another word to the native, our party proceeded on to the kraal. As they drew near, the first thing that fixed their attention was the skin of an ox, freshly taken from the carcass, and hanging upon one of the huts.

Swartboy, who was an acute observer, at once pronounced the hide to have belonged to one of the oxen he had lately assisted in driving; and the two Makalolo were of the same opinion. They pointed out to the white hunters the marks of their own pack-saddles.

None of the villagers who stood around could give any explanation of the presence of the hide.

None of them had ever seen it before; and the features of all were painfully distorted into expressions of astonishment when it was shown them!

Passing out from the kraal, the white hunters rode off over a plain that stretched northward. They did so because they saw something there that looked like a herd,

and they conjectured it might turn out to belong to them.

They were not wrong. The herd consisted entirely of their own stolen animals. They were guarded only by some women and children, who fled, screaming wildly, at the approach of the white party.

Riding up to the cattle, Groot Willem and Hendrick galloped on after the frightened women, who, by the efforts they were making to escape, plainly shewed that they expected nothing short of being killed, if overtaken.

Too glad at recovering their property, the hunters had not the slightest desire to molest the helpless women; yet, without intending it, they caused the death of one.

As they galloped after the affrighted

crowd, one of the women was seen to lag a little behind, and then fall suddenly to the earth.

The two horsemen pulled up, and then turned in the direction of the woman who had fallen. On getting near, they noticed that dim, glassy appearance of the eyes that denotes death.

Hendrick dismounted, and placed his hand over her heart. It had ceased to beat. There was no respiration. The woman was dead. She had been frightened to death.

By her side was a child, not more than a few months old.

And yet it gazed upon Hendrick with eyes flashing defiance. Its animal instinct had not been subdued by the fear of man; and its whole appearance gave evidence of

the truth of an assertion often made, that an African child, like a lion's cub, is born with its mental faculties wonderfully developed.

By this time the other women had gone far out of reach ; and none of them could be recalled. Hendrick was not inclined to leave the child by the side of its dead mother.

Undecided what to do he appealed to Willem, who had now also dismounted, and was standing beside him.

“ We have frightened the soul out of this poor woman,” said he. “ This child she has left behind her should be provided for. What shall we do with it? It will not be humane to leave the poor thing here.”

“ This is certainly a most unfortunate

affair," returned Willem, as he stood gazing at the dead body. "The blacks will think that we killed the woman, and will ever after have an opinion of white men they should not have. We must take the child to the kraal, and give it up to them. We can tell them that the woman died of her own folly, which is only the truth. Hand the piccaninny to me."

As Hendrick attempted to obey this request, the child, by loud screams, protested against being taken away from its mother. Its resistance was not confined to cries alone. Like a young tiger, it scratched and bit at the hands that held it; thus exhibiting a strong contrast to the conduct of its adult kindred, the Bechuannas, who have an instinctive fear

of white men, as well as a distaste for hostilities in any way.

Holding the young black under one arm, Willem galloped after the cattle, which, with the aid of the others, in less than an hour were driven up to the kraal. The only one missing was the ox whose hide had been seen upon the hut.

The child was delivered over to the chief. Swartboy explained to him the circumstances under which it had been found; and at Willem's request advised the Bechuanas never again to molest the property of other people.

To the surprise of our adventurers, not only the chief, but several of the elders, loudly declared that they knew nothing whatever of the cattle or the women found in charge of them; but while they were

thus talking, the two Makalolo pointed out the men who were loudest in declaring their ignorance as the very ones who had driven the animals away.

To escape from the discordant clamour of their tongues, the hunters turned hastily away, taking their cattle along with them.

Hendrick and Arend felt some inclination to punish the blacks for their treachery, as well as the loss of time and the trouble they had occasioned.

This, however, was forbidden by the great-hearted Willem, who could no more blame the natives for what they had done, than the bird that picks up a worm upon its path.

“ These poor creatures,” said he, “ know no better. They have never been taught

the precepts of religion ; and to them, right and wrong are almost the same thing. Leave them to learn a lesson from our mercy !”

CHAPTER X.

A LION HUNT.

ONCE more our adventurers turned their faces homeward.

Contrary to their expectations, the young camelopards caused them but little trouble. A single rheim attached to the neck of each, was sufficient to lead them along.

The manner in which both had been captured had taught them, in that first lesson, that man's will was superior to their own; and they were thenceforth too cunning or too silly to resist it.

Before they had been driven far along the road, there was but little danger of their straying, even if left free to do so. Like tame elephants, they knew neither their own strength nor swiftness, and soon became as easily managed as any of the horses or horned cattle.

For several days no incident worthy of notice occurred—nor did our adventurers much desire that any should.

They had obtained all they required, and even Groot Willem—before so enthusiastically fond of hunting—would not have turned aside to kill the finest koodoo that ever trod the plains of Africa,—unless its flesh had been absolutely wanted for food.

After a journey of two more weeks, Swartboy found himself in a land inhabited

by many of his countrymen—the Bushmen. It was a land he had long been looking forward to visit; and with pleasant anticipations, not from any sunny memory of youthful joys, but merely from that prejudice in favour of native land natural to all mankind.

He had ever represented to his young masters that the Bushmen were a race of noble warriors and hunters; that they were kind, hospitable, intelligent, and in every respect superior to the countrymen of his rival Congo.

They were now in a country inhabited by several wandering tribes of these people, and when opportunities might not be wanting to test the truth of Swartboy's assertions.

One soon presented itself.

Early one afternoon they arrived at a settlement of Bushmen—a kraal of their kind, containing about fifty families. On learning that they would have a long distance to travel before finding a place to encamp, our adventurers resolved to stay by the Bushmen's village for the night.

The first exhibition given of the hospitality Swartboy had boasted of, was by the whole tribe begging for tobacco, spirits, clothing, and everything else the travellers chanced to possess; while the only consideration they could give in return, was the permission to draw water from a pool in the vicinity of their kraal.

During the night a young heifer belonging to the head man of the village,

was carried off by a lion; and in the morning two of the natives were ordered to follow the beast and destroy it.

The hunters had often heard of the manner in which the Bushmen kill lions; and anxious to see the feat performed, they obtained permission to accompany the two men on their expedition.

The only implements carried by the Bushmen for the destruction of the king of beasts, were a buffalo-robe, a small bow, and some poisoned arrows, with which each was provided.

The lion was traced to a grove of trees, about a mile and a half from the kraal. To this place our adventurers proceeded, curious to see a lion die under the effects of a wound given by a tiny arrow, as also to learn how the Bushmen would approach

such a dangerous creature near enough to use such a weapon.

Gorged with its repast, there was no difficulty in getting near the lion. As the Bushmen anticipated, the fierce brute was enjoying a sound slumber.

Silently the two drew near—so near as almost to touch the sleeping monster.

The spectators, who had stopped at some distance off, dismounted from their horses; and with rifles ready for instant use, at a few yards behind the Bushmen, followed the latter, whose courage they could not help admiring.

Only one of the Bushmen drew his bow, the other, holding his buffalo-robe spread out upon both hands, went nearer to the lion than the one who was to inflict the mortal wound.

There was a moment of intense interest. In one second the lion could have tossed the bodies of the two little men crushed and mangled to the earth.

In another moment the tiny arrow was seen sticking in the monster's huge side, between two of the ribs.

Just as the fierce brute was springing to his feet with a loud growl,—just as he had caught a glimpse of the human face, the buffalo-skin was flung over his head.

He ran backwards, turned hastily around and disengaged himself from the robe, and then, astonished at the incomprehensible encounter, fled, without casting another glance behind.

So far as destroying him was concerned, the task of the Bushmen was accomplished. The poisoned arrow had

entered the animal's flesh, and they knew he was as sure to die as if a cannon-ball had carried off his head.

But the Bushmen had still something to do. They must carry back to their chief the paws of the lion, as proof that they had accomplished the errand on which they had been despatched.

They must follow the lion until he fell; and, curious to witness the result, our adventurers followed them.

Slowly at first, and with an apparent show of unconcern, the lion had moved away, though gradually increasing his speed.

The arrow could not have done much more than penetrate his thick hide; and, fearing that he might not die, Willem expressed some regret that he had

not given the brute a bullet from his roer.

“I am very glad you did not,” exclaimed Hans, on hearing Willem’s remark. “You would have spoilt all our interest in the pursuit. I want to see the effect of their poisoned arrow, and learn with my own eyes if a lion can be so easily killed.”

The wounded animal retreated for about a mile, then stopped and commenced roaring loudly. Something was evidently amiss with him, as he was seen turning as upon a pivot, and otherwise acting in a very eccentric manner.

The poison was beginning to do its work; and each moment the agony of the animal seemed to be on the increase. He laid himself down, and rolled over

and over. He then reared himself upon his hind-legs, all the while roaring like mad. Once he appeared to stand upon his head.

After a time he attacked a tree growing near, and tearing the bark both with teeth and claws, left the branches stained with his blood. He seemed as if he wished to rend the whole world.

Never had our adventurers, in all their hunting experience, been witnesses to such a terrific death-struggle. The sufferings of the great beast were frightful to behold, and awakened within the spectators a feeling of pity. They would have released it from its misery by a shot, had they not been desirous to learn all they could of the effects of the poison.

From the time the lion ceased to retreat, till the moment when he ceased to live, about fifteen minutes elapsed.

During that time the spectators saw a greater variety of acrobatic feats than they had ever witnessed in one scene before.

As soon as the creature was declared dead, the Bushmen cut off its paws, and carried them back to the kraal.

CHAPTER XI.

A SUDDEN REVERSE OF FORTUNE.

ON the third morning after leaving the Bushmen's kraal, our adventurers were awakened by the loud cries of a troop of black monkeys, that appeared in a neighbouring grove.

Something was giving them trouble. This could be told by the cries, which were evidently those of distress.

As breakfast was being prepared, and the cattle laden for a start, Willem and

Hendrick strolled towards the grove from whence the cries came. They were now more frightful than ever, and the monkey language seemed to say "Murder!"

In a tree where there were between twenty and thirty of these quadrumana, each about the size of an ordinary cat, was seen a young leopard, trying to capture a black monkey for his breakfast.

To avoid this enemy the apes had crawled out on the small slender branches, where the leopard dared not follow them, knowing that his weight would precipitate him to the ground.

For some time our hunters amused themselves by watching the abortive attempts of the leopard to procure the means of breaking its fast. He would pursue a monkey along the limb until the branch

became too small to be trusted any further. He would get within two or three feet of the screaming ape, and then stretch out one of his paws, while displaying his white teeth in a smile, as though desirous of shaking hands with the creature he was intending to destroy.

Finding his efforts to reach that particular monkey useless, he would then leave it to go through the same game with another.

One of the apes was at length chased out upon a large dead limb that extended horizontally from the trunk. The top had been broken off, and there being no slender twigs on which the monkey could take refuge, there was nothing to prevent the leopard from following it to the extremity of the branch, and seizing it at leisure.

There was no other branch to which the monkey could spring; and it was fairly in a dilemma. On perceiving this, it turned to the hunters, who stood below, and gazed at them with an expression that seemed to say, "Save me! save me!"

The leopard was so intent on obtaining his breakfast, that he did not notice the arrival of the two hunters until they were within twenty yards of the tree, and until he was close pursuing the monkey along the dead limb.

At this point, however, he paused. He had caught sight of "the human face divine;" and instinct told him that danger was near.

He gazed upon the intruders with flaming eyes, as if very little would induce

him to change the nature of his intended repast.

“Reserve *your* fire, Hendrick!” exclaimed Willem, as he brought the roer to his shoulder; “it may be needed.”

The leopard answered the report of the gun by making a somersault to the earth.

There was no necessity for Hendrick to waste any ammunition upon him. He had fallen in the agonies of death; and without even waiting for his last kick, Willem took hold of one of his hind-legs and commenced dragging the carcass towards the camp.

The camp was not far away, and they soon came in sight of it. To their surprise, they saw that it was in a state of commotion. The horses and cattle were running

in all directions, and so too were the men!

What could it mean?

The answer was obtained by their seeing a huge dark form standing in the middle of the camp. They recognized it as the body of a black rhinoceros—one of the largest kind. The fierce brute had taken his stand in the midst of the camping ground, and seemed undecided as to which of the fugitives he should follow. His ill-humour had arisen from the circumstance that, on seeking the place where he was in the habit of quenching his thirst, he had found it occupied by strange intruders.

A black rhinoceros would not hesitate to charge upon a whole regiment of cavalry; and the manner in which the one in question had introduced himself to the

camp was so impetuous as to cause a precipitate retreat both of man and beast—in short, everything that was free to get off.

One of the young giraffes had been too strongly secured to effect its escape. It was struggling on the ground; and by its side was an ox that the borelé had capsized in his first impetuous onset.

The second of the giraffes was fleeing over the plain, and had already gone further from the camp than any of the other animals.

It seemed not only inspired by fear, but by a new love of liberty.

The borelé soon selected an object for his pursuit, which was one of the pack-horses, and then charged right after him.

Meanwhile, Willem and Hendrick has-

tened on to the camp, where they were joined by two of the Makalolo. All the others had gone off after the cattle and horses.

The giraffe, in its efforts to escape, had thrown itself on the ground, and was fastened in such a way that it was in danger of being strangled in the rheims around its neck. As though to ensure its death, the ox that had been gored by the borelé became entangled in the same fastenings, and tightened them by his violent struggles.

The first care of the returned hunters was to release the young giraffe. This could have been done immediately, by cutting it free from its fastenings ; but then there was the danger of its following the example of its companion, and taking

advantage of the liberty thus given to it.

As the ox, whose struggles were nearly breaking its neck, had been gored by the borelé and seriously wounded, they saw it would be no good letting him live any longer; and, without more ado, he received his quietus from Hendrick's rifle.

The giraffe was now released, and restored to its proper fastenings. By this time the others had caught up most of the cattle and horses.

None of them—except the one selected for especial pursuit by the borelé—had gone far; but turning when out of danger, were easily caught. This was not the case with the camelopard that had got loose, and fled among the fore-

most. Its flight had been continued until it was no longer to be seen.

It had entered the grove from which Willem and Hendrick had just come ; and the chances were ten to one against their ever seeing it again.

Not a moment was to be lost, however, before making the attempt at recovery ; and, accompanied by Hendrick, Congo, and the dog Spoor'em, Willem started off for the forest, leaving the others to continue the task of collecting the animals still scattered over the plain.

But one brief hour before, Willem Van Wyk was the happiest hunter in existence ; and now he was about the most miserable. One of the two captives, for which he had suffered so many hardships, had escaped ; and in all probability

would never be seen again by the eyes of a white man.

The realization of his fondest hopes was delayed for a time,—perhaps for ever.

One camelopard was of but little value to him. He must have two; and fortune might never assist them in obtaining another. He was not sure of being able to keep the one that still remained,—death might take it out of their hands.

It had been injured in the struggle; and before leaving camp he had noticed that the efforts of the Makalolo to get it to its feet had not succeeded. His great undertaking,—the chief purpose of the expedition,—was as far as ever from being accomplished.

Such were the thoughts that tortured him as he urged Congo and the dog to greater haste in following the spoor through the forest.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LOST FOUND.

THE forest which Willem at first feared might be miles in extent, proved to be but a mere strip of timber, through which he soon passed, discovering an open plain on the other side. Nothing could be seen of the 'camelopard, though its tracks were found leading out upon the plain.

Willem's wishes were very difficult to meet. At first he was afraid the giraffe would be lost in a dense forest, where he

would be unable to gallop after it on horseback. Now, when contemplating the vast plain before him, he feared that the flight of the escaped captive might be continued for many miles, and he regretted that it had gone out of the timber.

The trees would have given it food and shelter, where it might have stayed until overtaken ; but it was not likely to make halt on an open plain.

It must now be many miles off, since they could see nothing of it.

The tracks could be followed but very slowly,—not half so fast as the animal itself had made them, while going in search of the kindred from which it had been so rudely separated several days before.

The longer they continued to take up

the spoor, the farther they would be from the animal that had left it!

All this was fully understood by our adventurers.

"It's no use going further," remarked Hendrick. "We have lost the creature beyond all hope of recovery. We may as well turn back to the camp."

"Not a bit of it," answered Willem; "the giraffe is mine, and I shan't part with it so cheaply. I'll follow it as long as I have strength left me sufficient to sit upon my horse. It must stop sometime and somewhere; and whenever that time comes, I shall be there not long after to have another look at it."

Thinking an hour or two more, of what he considered a hopeless chase, would satisfy even Willem, Hendrick made no

further objections, but continued on after Congo, who was leading along the spoor.

The sun had by this time crossed the meridian, and commenced descending towards the western horizon.

They had started from camp without eating breakfast; and their sudden departure had prevented them from bringing any food along with them. Thirsty and feeble from the long fast and the fatigue of tracking under a hot sun, they continued their course in anything but a lively fashion.

“Willem!” at length exclaimed Hendrick, suddenly pulling up his horse, “I am willing to do anything in reason, but I think we have already gone on this worse than wild-goose-chase a good many miles too far. We can scarce get back to the

camp before nightfall, and I shall commence returning now."

"All right," answered Willem, "I can't blame you; you are free to do as you please; but I shall go on. I need not expect others to act as foolishly as myself. This is my own affair, and you, as well as Congo, had better turn back. Leave me the dog, and I can track up the giraffe without you."

"No, no! baas Willem," exclaimed the Kaffir, "I go with *you* and Spoor'em. We no leave you."

Willem, Congo, and the dog moved on, leaving Hendrick gazing after them. He remained on the spot where he had pulled up his horse.

"Now this is interesting," muttered the young cornet, as he saw them go off. "I

have been acting without motives—acting like a fool, ever since we have been out on this expedition. Circumstances have driven me to it, and will do so again. Yes, I must follow Willem. Why should I desert him, when that poor Kaffir remains true? Is his friendship worth more than mine?”

Spurring his horse into a gallop, Hendrick was soon once more by the side of his forsaken companion.

Willem had a strong suspicion that he himself was acting without reason, in seeking for an object he could hardly expect to find. This sage reflection did not prevent him from continuing the search. Half distracted by the loss of the camelopard, he was scarce capable of knowing whether he now acted sensibly or like a fool!

To all appearance Hendrick had only followed him for the purpose of prevailing upon him to return.

Every argument that could be advanced against their proceeding further, was used by the young cornet—all to no purpose. Willem was determined to proceed, and persisted in his determination.

Evening approached, and still he was unwilling to give up the search.

They could not return that night, for they were now nearly a day's journey from the camp.

“Willem is mad,—hopelessly mad,” thought Hendrick, “and I must not leave him alone.”

They journeyed on together, and in silence, Hendrick fast approaching that state of mind in which he had just pro-

nounced Willem to be. But their journey was drawing near its termination. It was nearer than either of them expected to a successful issue.

A clump of trees was seen rising up over the plain. They were willows, and indicated the proximity of water. Towards these the tracks appeared to lead, in a line almost direct. The giraffe, guided by its instinct, had scented water. The horses ridden by the trackers did the same, and hastened forward to the clump of trees. There was a pool in the centre of the grove; and on its edge an animal, the sight of which drew an exclamation of joy from the lips of Groot Willem. It was the escaped camelopard! A second joyful shout was caused by their perceiving that it was again a captive! The loose rheim which it

had carried away around its neck, had become entangled among the bushes, and it was now secured, so that they had no difficulty in laying hold of it. Had they not come upon the spot, it would have perished, either by the suicidal act of self-strangulation, from thirst, or by the teeth of some fierce predatory animal.

The rheim was now unwound from the sapling to which it had attached itself, and the giraffe released from its irksome attitude. No harm had yet befallen it.

“Now, Hendrick,” exclaimed Willem, as he gazed upon the captive with an expression of pride and pleasure, “is it not better that we have saved this poor creature than to have left it to die a horrible death?”

“Yes, certainly,” answered his companion; “much good may sometimes result from what may appear a foolish course of conduct.”

Satisfied with the result of his perseverance, Willem was quite indifferent as to whether his course of conduct had been foolish or otherwise.

Congo did not seem the least surprised at the good fortune of his master, probably for the reason that he had the utmost confidence in his wisdom, and never for a moment had doubted that the giraffe would be discovered.

Willem never was without the means of lighting a fire. He was too fond of a pipe for that; and near a large blazing heap of wood they remained until daybreak.

The journey back to the camp was a

tedious one, but was made with much less heaviness of spirit than they had suffered when leaving it to go in search of the lost giraffe, which fortune had so favoured them in finding.

CHAPTER XIII.

WITH THE HOTTENTOTS.

ON reaching the camp, Willem and Hendrick found their companions anxiously awaiting their return.

The horses and cattle had all been recovered, and the borelé that had caused their dispersion had been shot by Hans and Arend.

Its attack had caused a delay of two days, and the loss of an ox.

Again the journey towards Graaff-Reinet

was resumed, and day by day was prosecuted with all the speed that could be made in safety to the animals.

The return journey was not completed until they had suffered many hardships, and had more than once nearly lost the two young giraffes.

On passing through the Hottentot country, they saw many large plains, from which the grass had lately been burnt; and not a morsel could be obtained for the subsistence of their animals.

Amidst the herbage, charred by the fire, they frequently saw the remains of serpents, and other reptiles, that had been scorched to death.

During the passage along these burnt tracts, the travellers suffered much from hunger and thirst, as did also their animals.

Such hardships Groot Willem seemed not to heed. His only care was for the young giraffes—his only fear that they might not be taken safely to their destination. But each hour of the toilsome journey was cheered by the knowledge that they were drawing nearer home ; and all that was disagreeable was endured with such patience as sprang from the prospect of a speedy termination to their toils.

The latter part of their route lay through a part of Southern Africa further to the west than any they had yet visited.

They passed through lands inhabited by certain tribes of natives of whom they had often heard and read, but had never seen.

Of some of the customs of those

unfortunate people, classed amongst that variety of the genus *homo* known as the Hottentot, they one afternoon became fully and painfully acquainted.

Beneath the shade of some stunted trees they found an aged man, and a child not more than eighteen months old.

The man, who could not have been less than seventy years of age, was totally blind; and by his side was an empty calabash, that had evidently once contained water.

With the assistance of Swartboy as interpreter, it was ascertained that he had lately lost by death an only son and protector. There was no one now to provide for his wants, and he had been carried far away from the home of his tribe, and left in the desert to die!

The child had lost its mother, its only parent, and had been “exposed” to death at the same time, and for the same reason—because there was no one to provide for it!

Both old man and infant had been thus left exposed to a death which must certainly ensue, either by thirst, hunger, or hyenas.

This horrid custom of the Hottentots was not entirely unknown to our adventurers. They had heard that the act, of which they now had ocular evidence, was once common amongst the inhabitants of the country through which they were passing, but, like thousands of others, had believed that such a barbarous custom had long ago been discontinued under the precept and example of European civiliza-

tion. They saw that they were mistaken, and that they were in the neighbourhood of a tribe that had either never heard these precepts of humanity, or had turned a deaf ear to them.

Knowing that a Hottentot kraal could not be many miles away, and unwilling to leave two human beings to such a fearful fate, the travellers determined to take the helpless creatures back to the people who, as Swartboy worded it, had "throwed 'em away."

Strange to say, the old man expressed himself not only willing to die where he sat, but showed a strong disinclination to being returned to his countrymen !

He had the philosophy to believe that he was old and helpless—a child for the

second time, and that by dying he was but performing his duty to society!

To be again placed in a position where he would be an encumbrance to those whom he could not call kindred, was in his opinion a crime he should not commit!

Our adventurers resolved upon saving him, in spite of himself!

It was not until late in the evening that they reached the kraal from which the outcasts had been ejected. Not a soul could be found in the whole community who would admit that the old man had ever been seen there before; and no one had the slightest knowledge of the child!

The white men were advised to take the objects of their solicitude to the place where they properly belonged.

“This is interesting,” said Hendrick;

“we might wander all over Southern Africa without finding a creature that will acknowledge having seen these hapless beings before. They are ours now, and we must provide for them in some way or other.”

“I do not see how we can do it,” rejoined Arend. “I’m quite sure that they are now with their own tribe; and it is they who should provide for them.”

A second effort was made to persuade the villagers to acknowledge some complicity in the attempt to starve two human beings; but they had already learnt that their conduct in such a custom was considered by white people as a crime; and, ashamed of what they had done, they stoutly adhered to the story they had first told.

Strangest of all, the feeble old man confirmed all their statements; and, as some proof of the truth of what they had said, he informed the travellers that the chief and several others, whom he called by name, were men incapable of practising a deception!

This he professed to know from a long acquaintance with them!

The hunters were now within the territory over which the colonial government claimed, and sometime enforced, dominion; and the Hottentots were threatened with the vengeance of English justice, in the event of their not taking care of the old man and child, or should they again expose them as they had already done.

They were told that a messenger should be sent to them within a few weeks, to

learn if their orders had been obeyed; and having delivered up the two helpless beings to the head man of the village, the travellers once more proceeded on their way.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DUTCHMAN'S FIRESIDE.

A FEW more days' journey brought them into a neighbourhood inhabited by several Dutch "boers."

They were now travelling upon a track dignified by the name of "road," which only benefited them so far as between the rivers, it conducted them without difficulty from one crossing place to another.

For the first time in several months they saw fields under cultivation by white

labour, and were able to procure a substance called "bread."

One evening, as they were preparing to encamp near the habitation of an apparently well-to-do boer, they received an invitation from the proprietor to make his house their home for the night.

A heavy, cold rain had been falling most part of the day, and to all appearance the weather would be no better during the night.

The invitation was gladly accepted, and the travellers, grouped around the wide hearth of the boer's kitchen fire, were enjoying that sense of happiness we all feel, to a greater or less extent, when perfectly secure from a storm heard raging without.

The horses and cattle had been driven under large sheds. The young giraffes

were secured in a place by themselves. Congo, Swartboy, and the Makalolo were in a hut near by, with some Hottentots—servants of the baas boer.

Their host was a free-hearted, cheerful sort of fellow, only too thankful that circumstances had given him some guests to entertain him.

His tobacco was of the best quality, and the supply of “Cape smoke”—the native peach brandy—was apparently unlimited.

According to his own account, he had been a great hunter during his youth; and there was now nothing he liked better than to relate incidents of his adventures in the chase, or to listen to the tales of others.

The only fault he had to find with our

heroes was that they were too moderate in the use of his "Cape smoke."

He was a convivial man—one who knew of nothing better to do after a long day's work than getting what is termed "jolly," in the company of friends. He did not care to imbibe alone; and he declared that nothing looked worse than that, except to see a man drinking too often in the presence of others, when they refused doing justice to his generosity.

According to his own account, he had been hard at work on his farm throughout all that day, and in the rain. Why should he not cheer himself after such protracted exposure? The "smoke" was the very thing to do it. His guests were welcome to the best his house could afford; and all the compensation he would ask in return

for his hospitality, would be the satisfaction of seeing them make themselves at home.

On the part of the boer, there was a strong determination to make his guests intoxicated ; but this was not observed by them.

They only believed that his hospitality was pushed a little too far—so much so as to be rather annoying ; but this was a fault they had observed in many who were only trying to put on their best behaviour ; and, considering its unselfishness, it could be readily excused.

Notwithstanding the many hardships Groot Willem and his companions had endured in their various excursions, they had never deemed it necessary to use ardent spirits to excess ; and the frequent and earnest entreaties of the boer, backed by

his fat and rather good-looking "vrow," could not induce them to depart from their usual practice of abstemiousness.

The boer pretended to be sorry at his inability to entertain his youthful guests.

Notwithstanding his assertions to the contrary, however, the hunters passed a long and pleasant evening by his fireside.

The supper provided for them, as well as everything else (except some of their host's hunting stories), was very good.

It was so seldom that the man had an opportunity of entertaining guests, that it seemed ingratitude on their part to deprive him of the pleasure he enjoyed; and, yielding to his solicitations, they did not retire until a late hour.

But there had been one chapter in the conversation of the evening to which none

of our adventurers listened with much pleasure. It was a statement made by the boer, after he had partaken of several glasses of the "smoke."

"Ish ver shorry you go get the money for the two cameels," said he; "mine two brudders and mine vrow's brudder stand chance to lose it now. Ish ver shorry for them, you know."

On further conversation it was discovered that his two brothers and the brother of his wife, had left for the North seven months before, on a hunting excursion, their principal object being to secure two young giraffes, for which the reward of five hundred pounds had been offered!

They were to visit the country of the Bakwains, and had taken with them a native servant, who belonged to that tribe.

Their return was hourly expected, and had been so for more than a month, though nothing had been heard of them since their departure.

It was but natural that the boer should wish that his own kinsmen might obtain the reward in preference to a party of strangers ; and his having so candidly expressed his regrets about the matter was rather a circumstance in his favour. His guests ascribed it to his open, straightforward manner, made a little more free by the application of the "smoke."

It was not until an old Dutch clock in the corner of the kitchen had struck two, that the young men, who pleaded their fatigue after a long day's march, were allowed to retire to their beds.

They were shown into a large room,

where a good soft couch had been prepared for each of them.

Their arduous journey seemed nearly over, for they had reached a place where people slept with their faces screened from the faint light of the stars, and without depending on the nature of the earth beneath them for the quality of their couch.

CHAPTER XV.

STRAYED OR STOLEN.

It was not until ten o'clock next morning that Hans awoke, and then aroused his companions.

“We should be ashamed of ourselves,” exclaimed Willem, as he hastily commenced making his toilet; “we have swallowed too much ‘smoke,’ and overslept ourselves.”

“No,” answered Hans, who was always anxious to prove himself the philosopher of the company, “we should rather feel

pride in the circumstance that the small quantity we drank has produced so great an effect. It is proof that we have not been in the habit of indulging in the use of ardent spirits, and *that* pride we should ever strive to maintain."

The travellers were soon in the presence of their host and hostess, whom they found waiting to do the honours of a well appointed breakfast, to which each of the hunters, except Willem, sat down. Willem could not be contented to eat until he had looked to the property in which he professed to have a much greater interest than his companions; and he would not sit down to the breakfast-table until he had paid a visit to his darling giraffes.

Walking out of the house, he went toward the sheds where the cattle and

native servants had been housed for the night.

On entering the hut where he had left his black companions the evening previous, he had before him a melancholy evidence of the evils of intemperance.

The four Makalolo were rolling about upon the floor, moaning heavily, as though in the last agonies of death.

Swartboy and Congo, more accustomed to the effect of strong drink, only showed by their heavy breathing that they were endeavouring to recover from their night's debauch by indulging in a sound slumber.

They were quickly roused to consciousness by Willem, who used the toe of his boot for the purpose; though even this rude appliance had no effect on any of the four Makalolo.

The Kaffir sprang to his feet, and, as though trying to carry his head in his hands, reeled out of the room. He was followed by his master, who saw that all efforts at inducing the Makalolo to resume their journey would be for several hours unavailable.

On moving around to the shed where the two giraffes had been tied, Willem was somewhat alarmed by an indescribable expression seen on the features of Congo.

The eyes seemed as if about to start from the Kaffir's head!

The distance between his chin and nose had alarmingly extended, and his whole appearance formed a frightful picture of astonishment and fear.

To Willem there needed no explanation. One glance was enough.

THE CAMELOPARDS WERE GONE!

The Bushman and Kaffir had promised to watch over them in turns, and had both neglected their duty by getting drunk.

Willem uttered not one word of reproach. Hope, fear, and chagrin kept him for a moment silent.

Within his mind was struggling a faint idea that the giraffes had been removed by some servants of the boer—perhaps to a more secure shed.

This hope was darkened with the fear that they had been stolen, or had helped themselves to freedom, and might never again be found.

During the first moments of his agony and despair, Groot Willem had the good sense to blame himself. He had been as

negligent as either of the two terror-stricken men now standing before him.

He should not have left to others the sole care of what he prized so highly. For the sake of a few hours of better fare than that to which he had lately been accustomed, why had he neglected to look after a prize that had cost so many toils and so much time in obtaining?

Why could he not have lived a few days longer as he had for so many months—watchful, thoughtful, on the alert? All would then have been well.

A search of five minutes amongst the huts and sheds told him that the giraffes were certainly gone.

The task was to recover them. Directing Swartboy and Congo to make all the inquiries they could, as to the time

and manner of their disappearance, the great hunter hurried despairingly towards the house, to communicate to his companions the misfortune that had befallen them.

The news took away every appetite. The grand breakfast prepared by the vrow and her attendant dusky handmaidens, was likely to remain uneaten ; for all, starting up from their seats, hastened towards the shed where the giraffes had been confined.

The hospitable boer expressed a keen sympathy for their misfortune, and declared his willingness to spend a month, if need be, with all his servants, in the recovery of the lost camelopards.

“All dish comes of drinking so mush smokes,” said he ; “mine beoples last night

all got more so drunk, put they mush do so no more. I shall spill all de smokes on de ground, and puy no more for ever."

One of the giraffes had been tied to a post forming part of the shed in which they had been shut up.

The post had not only been torn out of the earth, but from its fastenings at the top, and was lying on the ground, six or eight paces from where it had formerly stood.

Two other posts adjoining had been pushed down, making a breach in the inclosure sufficiently large for the giraffes to have made their exit.

Had they been tied to trees, as usual, they could not have escaped—the rheims around their slender necks would have held

them. Perhaps by the weight and strength of their bodies they had pushed down the stockade, and the rheims had slipped over the ends of the posts after they had fallen. In this manner they might have escaped. But though it seemed simple enough, still there was something strange in it; and our travellers thought so.

The captives had lately shown no disposition to get free, and it was odd they should do so now. Moreover, there must have been a premeditated, jointly-contrived plan between them; and this could hardly be supposed to exist. They were gone, however, and must be sought for and brought back.

For this duty Congo was already making preparations, though with very little prospect of success. Rain had been falling

heavily all the night, and had destroyed any chance of the lost animals being tracked, even by Spoor'em.

Within a large inclosure contiguous to the boer's dwelling, more than five hundred cattle had been penned up during the night.

These had been turned out to graze that morning, and, in consequence, the ground was everywhere covered with the hoof-marks of horses and cattle.

A full hour was spent in finding a track that could with any certainty be pronounced that of a giraffe, and this had been made by the animals going in the direction of the shed. Of course it was the spoor of the camelopards, when first led up on the evening before.

"Hendrick," exclaimed Willem, nearly

frantic with despair, "what shall we do? Those giraffes are somewhere, and must be found."

"They are just as likely to have gone in one direction as another," answered Hendrick; "and suppose we look for them in the direction of Graaff-Reinet?"

This remark but increased Willem's despair; for it showed an unwillingness on the part of his comrades to make any further delay on account of their misfortune.

The boer declared himself willing to furnish horses and men for a search, if the hunters could ascertain with any certainty the direction the runaways had taken.

Hans now volunteered a bit of advice, which was listened to by Willem, as being the most reasonable yet given.

“Our late captives,” said that philosopher, “have made the best of a good opportunity for escaping. It was, no doubt, done under an instinct; and the same instinct will be likely to guide them back towards their native land. If we go in search of them, let the search be made in the direction from whence they came.”

“Mine poys,” broke in the boer, “dere ist no use lookin’ if they goed that way. Dey will not wait fast enough for any poddy to catch up to them.”

Hendrick and Arend expressed themselves of the same opinion.

“Congo, you black scoundrel!” exclaimed Willem, “where are our giraffes? Which way shall we look for them?”

In answer to this question the bewil-

dered Kaffir could only shake his aching head.

Willem had great faith in Congo's instinct, and was not satisfied with the limited information received from him.

"Do you think, Congo, we had better follow the spoor we made in coming here?" he asked.

Again the Kaffir shook his head.

"You sooty idiot!" exclaimed the distracted questioner, "answer me in some other way. No more wobbling of your head, or I'll break it for you."

"I don't think at all now, baas Willem," said Congo. "My head feel too big for de question you put 'im."

Hendrick was about to observe that there was a vast difference between the Kaffir and his master, but not wishing to

vex the latter any more, he proposed that something should be done besides talking.

“Hans,” exclaimed Willem, “you stay here, and look after our property. All the others who wish it, can come along with me. But whoever does, must get into his saddle in the shortest possible time. I’m off this instant in search of the fugitives.”

So saying, Groot Willem made a rush towards the shed in which his horse had been stabled; and putting on the saddle with his own hands, he sprang into it, and rode hastily away.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST OF A FAMILY.

HENDRICK and Arend, who alone had imitated his movements, followed Groot Willem from the house.

The boer, after promising so much, appeared so dilatory in his preparations, that no dependence could be placed on his aid; and the three hunters galloped off without waiting for any of his farm servants, of whom they had seen several. His excuse for not making more haste

to provide help, was that no one could tell the direction in which the runaways had gone, and that to search for them in the north, when the animals might have strayed south, was sheer silliness.

Much to the surprise of all, Congo had stayed behind, instead of accompanying Groot Willem, according to universal custom. The Kaffir's solicitude for the safety of his young master had been so great on all former occasions, and he had shown such an unwillingness to be separated from him, that his present behaviour was a surprise to everybody who knew him.

He was allowed to have his own will and way ; for it was known that any efforts at making him useful by denying him this privilege, would be of no avail.

True and faithful as he had ever shown himself, his actions were seldom controlled by the others.

“As soon as we get a mile or two away from the house,” said Hendrick, “we may be able to discover their tracks. It’s no use our examining the ground over which so many cattle have passed. But supposing we should learn that we are on the right course, what then, Willem?”

“Then we must follow it until the giraffes are retaken,” replied Willem. “I should have but little hope of catching them again,” he continued, “did I not know that they are now quite tame. I should as soon think of my own horse absconding, and going a hundred miles into the wilderness to avoid me. We shall find the giraffes if we persevere;

and once found, they won't hinder us from catching them."

From the quiet behaviour of the giraffes for the last three weeks, Arend and Hendrick could not deny the truth of Willem's assertions; and all three urged their horses forward, more anxious than ever to come upon the spoor of the strays.

After passing beyond the ground tracked by the farm cattle, they once more came out upon the so-called road along which they had travelled the day before.

But for more than a mile, after the most careful examination, no spoor of giraffe, old or young, was to be seen, Even those made by them the day before could no longer be distinguished in the dust. The rain, with the tracks of other animals coming after, had obliterated them.

The state of the ground they were examining was now favourable for receiving a permanent impression, and as none appeared, they became satisfied that the runaways had not returned that way.

After a long consultation, that came near ending in a wrangle, Willem being opposed by his companions, it was decided that they should ride round in a circle, of which the dwelling of the boer should be the centre. By so doing, the spoor of the lost animals should be found. It was the only plan for them to take; and slowly they rode on, feeling very uncomfortable at the uncertainty that surrounded them.

The country over which they were riding was a poor pasture, with patches

of thinly-growing grass. A herd of cattle and horses, old and young, had lately gone over the ground; and often would the eye catch sight of tracks so like those made by a giraffe, that one of the party would dismount for a close examination, before being able to decide.

To Groot Willem, this slow process was torturing in the extreme. He believed that the giraffes were each moment moving farther away.

After the search had been continued for nearly two hours, a spoor was at length found that was unmistakably that of a camelopard. With a shout of joy, Willem turned his horse, and commenced taking it up. It was fresh made, but a few hours before.

Under the excitement of extreme fortune, whether it be good or bad, people do not act with much wisdom.

So thought Hendrick, as he called the attention of Willem to the fact that they had started out for the purpose of finding the spoor, but not following it; that they would require the help of Congo and Spoor'em; that they must provide themselves with food and other articles necessary for a two or three days' journey.

Believing that by the time they could go back to the house and return, the giraffes would gain a distance of not less than ten or fifteen miles, Hendrick's suggestions seemed absurd, and his companion, without heeding them, kept on along the trail.

Hendrick and Arend could do nothing but follow. Before they had gone very far, Arend made the observation that the tracks they were now following appeared too large to have been made by the young giraffes.

“That’s all a fancy of yours,” rejoined Willem, as he hurried on.

“There appears to have been only one that went this way,” said Hendrick, after they had gone a little farther.

“Never mind,” answered Willem, “we have no time to look for the other. It won’t be far away from its companion, and we shall probably find them together.”

Notwithstanding what Willem said, his comrades were convinced that they were following the track of only one

giraffe, and that larger than either of those that had been lost. They again ventured to give their opinion about it.

“Nonsense!” exclaimed Willem, “there has not been a giraffe in this part of the country for the last ten years, except the two we ourselves brought here.”

This statement would have been indorsed by every settler for a hundred miles round. For all that, it was a wrong one, as our adventurers soon had reason to be convinced.

Before they had gone another mile, the long body and lofty head of a giraffe loomed up before their eyes! On seeing it, they put spurs to their horses, and rode up straight towards it.

They got within three hundred yards

of it before their approach was discovered.

For the first ten minutes of the chase that then ensued, the distance between the hunters and the retreating giraffe remained about the same.

Gradually it began to diminish. The giraffe appeared to become exhausted, with only a slight exertion; and, on reaching a piece of marshy ground, where its feet sank into the mud, it made a violent struggle and then fell over on its side.

On riding forward to the spot, the hunters had an explanation of why the race was so soon over. They were only surprised that the creature had been able to run at all.

It proved to be an ancient male, of

which little was left but the skin and bones.

It looked as though it was the last of its race, about to become extinct.

On its back, and other parts of its body, were lumps as large as walnuts, the scars of old wounds, where musket-bullets had been lodged in its body several years before !

The rusty head of an arrow was also seen protruding from its side. It had the appearance of having been hunted for a score of years, and hundreds of times to have been within an inch of losing its life.

Its enemy, man, had overtaken it at last, and was gazing upon its struggles, not with exultation, but rather with pity and regret.

They felt no triumph in having run down and captured a thing that had been so long struggling with death.

Groot Willem, who had been for a time highly elated with the prospect of recovering the lost giraffes, was again in great despondency.

Much time had been squandered in this purposeless pursuit.

He was not one to yield easily to despair: and yet despair was now upon him. There was every symptom of a dark night coming down, and it was now near. Inspired either by pity or revenge, he sent a bullet from the roer into the head of the struggling skeleton; and, throwing himself into the saddle, he turned once more towards the house.

An attempt had been made to recover the lost giraffes. It had failed. Night was close at hand, nothing more could be done for that day; and Willem now declared his willingness to return to Graaff-Reinet and die.

Hope had departed from his heart; and he no longer felt a desire to live.

Hendrick and Arend, although sympathizing with him in their common misfortune, exchanged looks of congratulation.

They would now be permitted to go home!

CHAPTER XVII.

NEWS OF THE LOST.

THE sky had been overclouded all day, and continued so. As the sun went down, over them descended a night as dark as Erebus.

Perceiving the impracticability of getting that night to the house of the boer—a distance of ten or fifteen miles—the disappointed trackers dismounted, and staked their horses upon the grass, determined to wait the return of another day.

The night was passed in fitful slumbers around a camp fire, where they were only visited by a flight of large moths, and some laughing hyenas, that, by their harsh cachinnations, seemed to mock them in their misery.

They were in a district of country from which the most noble of its denizens seemed to have been driven, and the most despicable only remained.

When morning dawned, they again climbed into their saddles, and continued on towards the kraal of the boer.

When, as they supposed, within about five miles of the house, they met two strange horsemen, coming in the opposite direction.

“Goot morgen, shentlemens!” saluted one of the strangers, as they drew near.

"I'm glat to meet some ones coming your ways. Hash you seen anything of our horses?"

"Do you mean those you are now riding?" asked Hendrick.

"No, not these, but five other horses—no three horses, and two mares, all witout either saddles or pridels—one ret horse mit one eye and a white poot on the left pehind leg—one mare mit a star on the front of her head, and—"

"No," interrupted Hendrick; "we have been out since yesterday morning, but have seen no stray horses of ,any description—not a horse, except those we are riding ourselves."

"Then we need not look in the direction you have been," said the other

horseman, who spoke English with a proper accent. "Will you please tell us whence you have come?"

Hendrick gave them a brief history of their course during the last twenty-four hours; and, in doing so, mentioned the object of their expedition—the search after the giraffes.

"If that's what you've been after," said the man who spoke proper English, "perhaps we can assist you a little. From what you tell me, I presume you must have been staying at the kraal of Mynheer Von Ormon? Yesterday morning we were looking for our horses about ten miles south of his place, when we saw two giraffes—the first I had ever seen in my life. We were badly mounted, and unprepared for hunting

anything, except our strayed horses, else we should have given chase."

"Ten miles to the south of the kraal!" exclaimed Willem, "and we seeking for them twenty to the north! What fools we have been. What were the giraffes doing?" he asked earnestly, turning towards the man who had once more awakened within him the sweet sentiment of hope. "Were they grazing or going on?"

"They were travelling southward, at a gentle trot; but increased their speed on seeing us. We were not within a quarter of a mile of them."

Our adventurers were too impatient to stay longer on the spot; and, after getting a few further directions, they bade the strangers good-day, and hastened on towards the house.

On entering its inclosure, the first person they encountered was the boer, Mynheer Von Ormon.

"I see pat luck mit you, mine poys," said the Dutchman, as they rode up to him. "I knowed it would pe so; the cameels have goed too far for you."

"Yes, too far to the south," answered Willem; "we have heard of them, and must be off immediately. Where are our companions?"

"They goed away yester morgen, to live where the oxen get grass. They now waiting for you at the south."

"That's all right," said Hendrick; "we must hasten to join them; but I think we had better have something to eat first—I'm starving. Mynheer Von Or-

mon, we must again trespass on your hospitality."

"So you shall, mine poys, mit pleasure, all around; put who tolt you I was Myn-heer Von Ormon?"

"The same two men who told us about the giraffes. They were looking for some stray horses."

"Dat mush be mine neighbour Cloots, who live fifteen miles to the east of thish place. They say they see the cameels? Where an' when they see 'em?"

"Yesterday morning, about ten miles south of this place, they said."

"May be dey be gone to Graaff-Reinet, to say you are coming! Ha—ha—ha! Dat ist ber goot!"

The boer then conducted his guests towards the dwelling!

On passing a hut by the way, the hunters were surprised at seeing Congo suddenly disappear round a corner.

On the part of the Kaffir, the encounter appeared both unexpected and undesired: he had started back apparently to avoid them.

This was a new mystery.

“Ho! Congo! come back,” shouted Willem. “Why are you here? Why are you not with the others?”

The Kaffir did not condescend to make answer, but skulked into the hut.

The boer now proceeded to explain that the Kaffir had expressed a wish to be employed at his place: and had declared that he would proceed no farther with his former masters, who had cruelly ill-treated him for allowing the giraffes to escape.

He denied having done anything to influence this strange decision.

“This cannot be,” said Willem ; “there must be some mistake. He is not telling the truth if he says that we beat him. I may have spoken to him somewhat harshly. I admit having done so ; but I did not know he was so sensitive. I’m sorry if I have offended him, and am willing to apologize.”

Mynheer Von Ormon stepped up to the door of the hut, and commanded the Kaffir to come forth.

When Congo showed himself at the entrance, Willem apologized to him for the harsh language he had used ; and, in the same manner as one friend should speak to another, entreated him to forget and

forgive, and return with them to Graaff-Reinet.

During this colloquy, the sharp eyes of the boer were glancing from master to servant, as though he anticipated what the result would be. They showed a gleam of satisfaction as the Kaffir declared that he preferred remaining with his new master; and the only favour he now asked of Willem, was some compensation for his past services.

Had Congo been one of the brothers, Hans or Hendrick Von Bloom, Willem could not have done more towards effecting a reconciliation. At length, becoming indignant at the unaccountable conduct of his old servitor, he turned scornfully away, and, along with Hendrick and Arend, entered the house.

After seeing a joint of cold boiled beef, a loaf of brown bread, and a bottle of Cape wine placed before his guests, the boer went out again.

Hastily repairing to one of the sheds, he there found a Hottentot hard at work in saddling one of his horses.

“Piet,” said he, speaking in great haste, “quick, mine poy! Shump into your saddle, and ride out to the north, until you meet mine prudder an’ Shames. Tell them not to come more so near as half a mile to the house for one hour. Make haste and pe off!”

Two minutes more, and the Hottentot was on the horse, galloping away in the direction given to him.

Having satisfied their hunger, thanked their host and his fat vrow for their

hospitality, and bidden them farewell, our adventurers started off for the south, anxious to rejoin Hans, and continue the search for the giraffes.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHY CONGO TURNED TRAITOR.

UNWILLING to trespass any longer on the hospitality of Mynheer Von Ormon, Hans had left the house with the intention of encamping somewhere near it, and waiting for the return of his companions.

To this the boer had made but little opposition, and his guest proceeded to prepare the Makalolo for a removal.

They were still suffering all the horrors of a recovery from their first spell of intoxication; and, on entering the hut where

they had passed the night, Hans found them full of that species of repentance that leads to strong resolutions of future reformation.

On being informed of the loss of the giraffes, their remorse seemed as if it would tempt them to suicide; and one of them, while tearing the woolly covering from his head, kept repeating the word *kombi!* *kombi!*

Hans knew that this was a virulent poison, much in use among the Makalolo.

The four unfortunate men were willing to take upon themselves the whole blame of allowing the giraffes to escape, and seemed grateful for the mercy of being allowed to live any longer.

After the cattle and horses had been loaded, and all got ready for a start,

Congo expressed his determination to stay behind.

“What does this mean, Congo?” asked Hans. “Are you angry at what your master said to you? You must forget that—he meant no harm. What do you intend doing?”

“Don’t know, baas Hans,” gruffly answered Congo; “don’t know nuffin.”

Believing that the Kaffir was only displeased with himself for his conduct on the previous night, and that he would soon recover from his “miff,” Hans made no attempt to dissuade him.

Accompanied by Swartboy and the Makalolo, he moved away, driving the cattle in front of them, and leaving Congo and his dog behind.

He went in a southerly course, as the

grass looked more tempting in that direction. When about three miles from the house, he came upon a grove of trees, through which ran a little rivulet; on its banks he determined to make camp, and await the return of his companions.

The manner in which he had left the boer had been rather sudden and uncere-
monious; and, if called upon to give an explanation of it, only some half-developed reasons would have presented themselves to his mind.

Of these, however, there were several. One was the desire of removing the Makalolo, now under his sole care, from the temptation of swallowing any more "Cape smoke."

This apprehension, however, was altogether groundless; for not even a relief

from aching heads and self-condemnation could have induced the subjects of Macora to drink any more for the present.

Hans possessed a philosophic spirit, and, under most circumstances, could wait patiently. Swartboy and the Makalolo were in want of rest, to enable them to recover from their last night's debauch. The cattle and horses were in need of the grass that grew luxuriantly on the banks of the stream. All, therefore, could pass the day with but little inconvenience arising from the absence of the others.

As the night came on, the cattle were collected; and, availing themselves of the habit to which they had long since been trained, they lay down close to the large fire that had been kindled by the edge of the grove.

The night passed without any incident to disturb them ; but just as day broke, they were awakened by the barking of a dog, and soon after greeted by a familiar voice.

It was that of Congo.

“I thought you would think better of us, and return,” said Hans, pleased once more to see the face of the faithful Kaffir.

“Yaas, I come,” answered Congo, “but not to stay. I go back again.”

“Why ! what’s brought you then ?”

“To see baas Willem ; but he no here. Tell him, when he come back, to wait for Congo. Tell him to wait two days, four days,—tell him always wait till Congo come.”

“But Willem will go to the house

before he comes here, and you can see him yourself."

"No; may be I off with the boer oxen. I work there now. Tell baas Willem to wait for Congo!"

"Certainly, I shall do so," answered Hans. "But you are keeping something hid from me. Why do you wish to see your master, if you are so offended as to have forsaken him? What is your reason for staying behind?"

"Don't know," vaguely rejoined the Kaffir; "dis fool Congo don't know nuffin."

"Der's one thing I mus' say for Congo," said Swartboy, "he mos' allers tell de troof. He jus' done so now!"

The Kaffir grinned, as though satisfied with Swartboy's remark.

After again requesting that Willem

should be told to wait his return, he hastened away, followed by his dog Spoor'em.

There was a mystery in the conduct of the man that Hans could not comprehend in any other way than by taking the explanation he had himself given.

Congo seemed certainly either to be a fool, or acting in a very foolish manner.

As the morning advanced, Hans began to believe that the trackers had proved successful in their search.

The spoor of the giraffes must have been found and followed, or they would have been back before then.

From his knowledge of Willem, Hans was certain that, once on the spoor, he would never leave it as long as he had strength to continue.

The giraffes had become tame, and there was no reason why they should not be easily retaken.

But just as the sun had mounted up to the meridian, this hope was dispelled by the appearance of Willem and his companions coming back empty-handed.

“You have been unsuccessful?” observed Hans, as they rode up. “Well, never mind, there is still a hope left us, and that is to get safely home.”

“We have another hope besides that,” replied Willem. “We have heard of the giraffes. They were seen yesterday morning, about seven miles to the southward of this spot. They are between us and our home; and we are not hunters if we don’t recover them yet. We must be off after them immediately.”

Swartboy and the Makalolo were directed to drive in the cattle; and all commenced making preparations for a departure.

“We shall miss Congo and Spoor'em,” remarked Willem, while the cattle were being loaded; “we shall want them badly now.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Hans, “I had nearly forgotten to tell you that Congo was here this morning, and wished me to say you were to wait until he came to you. He was very anxious to see you, and said you were to wait for him four days—or longer, if he did not see you in that time.”

“Fortunately, there will be no need for that delay,” rejoined Willem; “I have just seen the ungrateful rascal,—not half an hour ago.”

“Indeed! and what did he want?”

“Only to dun me for the wages due to him for the last year of his service. I have never been more deceived about a man in my life. I could not have believed it possible that Congo would thus turn traitor and desert me.”

The conversation was discontinued, as all became busy in making ready for a start.

CHAPTER XIX.

LIGHT OUT OF DARKNESS.

IN half an hour afterwards the hunters had broken up their camp.

“I feel sorry about having to leave Congo behind,” said Willem, as the cattle were being driven across the stream. “Not that I care a straw for him, the ungrateful wretch ! but we may be unable to find the spoor of the giraffes, not having him with us. He and Spoor’em would be worth everything now.”

“I think,” rejoined his brother, “there’s not much chance of our recovering them. We are now in a settled country, where they will find but little rest. They will be driven out of it—killed by whoever comes across them.”

“I have thought of all that,” replied Willem; “still, I shall hope for a day or two longer. I can better survive their loss if nobody else succeeds in obtaining the reward offered for them; but should that brother—of whom the boer spoke as being gone on a similar expedition to ours—should *he* perform the feat we have failed to accomplish, then I shouldn’t care to live much longer.”

Before they had gone very far, all noticed that there was something wrong with Swartboy, who seemed also inclined to

turn back, and was muttering some gibberish to himself, as was his habit when in any way perplexed or annoyed.

The excitement in his mind at last became too strong to be restrained, and, drawing near Willem, he asked, "What was that, baas Willem, you said jus' now 'bout the brudder ob dat Dutchman?"

"I hardly remember, Swart," answered Willem; "something about his going after giraffes, and getting the reward instead of ourselves. Why do you ask?"

"But did they gone nort' same as we been adoin'?"

"Yes, so the boer told us."

"How long was dat ago?"

"Seven months, I think he said."

“Why for you no tell me afore?”

This question Willem did not think worth answering, and Swartboy, for a few minutes, was left to his thoughts.

Presently he recommenced the conversation. “Baas Willem,” said he, “I think we bes’ stop, and talk a bit. Congo no fool, but Swartboy. Swartboy a fool, and no mistake ’bout dat.”

“Well, what has that to do with our stopping for a talk?” asked Willem.

“De boer’s brudder he come back from de nort’ without catch any giraffe,” replied the Bushman. “I tink he got some now!”

A light suddenly dawned on the mind of Hans, who stood listening to this dialogue. The mysterious conduct of Congo appeared better than half explained.

A halt was immediately ordered, and all gathered around Swartboy.

Nearly twenty minutes were taken up in obtaining from the Bushman the information he had to give.

From the answers made to about a hundred questions, the hunters learnt that in the hut where he, Congo, and the Makalolo had been so freely entertained, they had seen a Hottentot who had lately returned from a journey to the north.

This Swartboy had understood from a few words the man had muttered while under the influence of the "smoke."

During the evening, the Hottentot had been called away from the hut, and Swartboy had seen no more of him, nor thought anything of what he had said.

Now, however, on hearing that the boer had a brother who had gone northward on a giraffe hunt, Swartboy conceived the idea that the drunken Hottentot had not been there alone. In all likelihood he had accompanied the expedition. It had returned unsuccessful, and the boer's brothers had stolen the two giraffes that were now missing.

The more this conjecture was discussed, the more probable it appeared. No doubt Congo had some suspicion that there was something wrong, and he was keeping it to himself, lest he might be mistaken. He had stayed behind in the hope of ascertaining the truth! His rude behaviour to his former master in the presence of the boer, might have been only a *ruse* to mislead the latter, and give an oppor-

tunity for carrying out some detective contrivance. It was all in keeping with the Kaffir's character; and Willem was but too delighted to think that such was the explanation.

"I thought at the time I last saw him," said Willem, "that there was something in his behaviour unlike what would be shown by a traitor. It seemed to contradict his words. I believe that we have all been very stupid: I hope so. I shall go back and see Congo immediately. I shall demand an explanation. He will tell me all if I can only get the boer out of the way."

"I have another idea," said Hendrick. "The two men we saw hunting for horses, —and who told us they had seen our

giraffes to the south,—deceived us. They did not speak like men telling the truth. I can see it now. We were simpletons to have been so easily deceived. They were the boer's own brothers—the very men who have robbed us!”

“Yes,” said Hans, “and they had the assistance of Mynheer Von Ormon in doing it. How easy it is to understand his profuse hospitality now! We have indeed been duped!”

The belief that the giraffes had been stolen was now universal; and our adventurers were only too glad to think so.

They much preferred this should be the case, to thinking the animals had strayed. There would be a far better chance of recovering them.

It is easy to believe what we most desire,—and all agreed that the property had been surreptitiously taken from the shed.

Without saying another word, Groot Willem turned his horse upon his tracks, and rode back towards the kraal of Mynheer Von Ormon.

The boer met him outside the inclosure, apparently surprised to see him return.

The moment Willem set eyes upon the man's face, he saw that there was something amiss. He observed a strong expression of displeasure, accompanied with a glance of uneasiness.

“I have come back to have a chat with my old servant,” said Willem. “He has been with me for so many years, that I

don't like to part with him on slight grounds."

"Ver goot," answered Von Ormon ;
"you can see him when he comes home.
He has goed after the oxen. If you
pleash, take him along mit you when
you leave."

As the sun was now about setting, Willem knew that the Kaffir must soon be coming in with the cattle ; and he rode off from the house, in the hope of meeting him. Soon a large herd was seen approaching from the plain, and riding around it, Willem found Congo in company with his Hottentots.

While in the presence of his companions, the Kaffir would not speak to him, but was apparently devoting every thought to the task of directing the movements

of the herd. His old master seemed unworthy of his notice.

“We have been all wrong in our conjectures,” thought Willem, “Congo has really deserted me. No man could keep up such an appearance as he is doing. I may go back again.”

He was about to turn away, when Congo, observing that both the Hottentots had gone a few yards ahead, and were busy talking to one another, muttered in a low tone, “Go back, baas Willem, and wait at you camp. I come dar to-morrow mornin’.”

Willem was not only satisfied, but overjoyed. Those words were enough to tell him that his Kaffir was still faithful,—that he was acting for the best, and all would yet be well.

He returned to his companions as cheerful and happy as he had been two nights before, while sitting by the Dutchman's fireside, under the exhilarating influence of the "smoke."

CHAPTER XX.

THE KAFFIR DISCOVERS TOO MUCH.

WHEN Congo was made aware that the giraffes were missing, he believed himself more to blame than any one else. Conscience told him that he had neglected his duty. His regret for what had happened inspired him with a strong resolve to do all in his power towards recovering the lost animals.

On examining the broken stockade through which they had escaped, he had doubts as to its being their work.

In crushing out the posts with the weight of their bodies, they must have made a noise that he should have heard ; for the giraffes had been tied within ten yards of where he passed the night.

The posts to which they had been attached had not been dragged away, as would have been the case had the animals drawn them out with their rein fastenings.

He had a suspicion that they had been taken down by human hands ; but, as the others did not appear to think so, he fancied there might be a possibility of his being wrong. He therefore kept his suspicions to himself. Had he said that the giraffes could not have knocked down the stockade without his hearing them, he would have been told that he was

too drunk to hear anything, and his testimony would have been discredited. He knew that he was not.

He had observed something else to increase his suspicions.

He remembered the Hottentot, who in his cups declared that he had lately been to the north, where he had seen giraffes hunted and killed.

He had heard the Hottentot called out from among the company, and by a man who spoke "boerish English."

The voice was not that of the proprietor of the place, whom he had seen early in the evening; and yet he had observed no other white man about the establishment.

Moreover, some saddled horses he had seen in the stables the night before were also gone. It was these things that had

determined him to stay at the house and watch.

On pretence of hiring himself to the boer, he was permitted to remain.

Every day something turned up to confirm his suspicions.

He had seen the Hottentot sent off, while Willem, Arend, and Hendrick were eating their breakfast inside; and, soon after their departure, he had witnessed the arrival of the two white men, who appeared to consider the place their home.

Those men, he believed, had been there on the night when the giraffes were missed, and Congo suspected them to be the thieves.

He saw them go off again in the direction they had come—equipped as for a

hunting expedition, or for some distant journey.

He would have followed them, but dared not, lest his doing so might be observed, and excite the suspicions of the boer.

Believing that they would not go far that night, he made up his mind to track them on the following morning.

Stealing away from the shed where he slept, he took up their spoor as soon as the first light of day would allow of his following it, and soon he saw enough to assure him that his suspicions were correct.

A journey of ten miles brought him amongst some ranges of steep hills, separated from each other by deep, narrow gorges. On ascending to the top of one of these, he perceived a small column of smoke rising from a ravine below.

Throwing his hat upon the ground, and commanding the dog Spoor'em to keep a watch upon it, he stalked forward, and soon obtained a view of what was causing the smoke. It was a fire kindled under some kameel doorn trees—as if for the bivouac of hunters.

Judging by two animals that stood tied to the trees, Congo knew that they who had kindled the fire were not hunters, but thieves. The animals in question were giraffes—young ones—the same that Congo had been driving before him for some hundreds of miles.

Contrary to his expectations, there appeared to be but one man in charge of them; and that neither of the two he had seen the evening before at Von Ormon's.

The men he had been tracking must

have visited the camp, and gone off again. Their absence was but of little consequence. The giraffes were there, and that was all he wanted. He could go back, and guide the real owners to the spot, who would then be able to reclaim their property.

Had the two men he had traced to the camp been seated by the fire, he would no doubt have succeeded in accomplishing his plans. But, unfortunately, they were not.

After noticing the topography of the place, so that he might easily recognize it, he turned to depart.

Before proceeding twenty paces on his way, he was startled by the report of a gun. The sound was followed by a howl of pain, which he knew came from the hound Spoor'em.

At the same instant, trotting out from

some bushes on the brow of the hill, he saw two mounted men.

One glance told him they were the men he had seen the evening before at the house of Von Ormon. They were those on whose tracks he had come.

Crouching among the bushes, he endeavoured to avoid being seen ; but in this he was unsuccessful.

A shout from one of the men told him he was discovered ; and, after, the hoof-strokes of the galloping horses told him they were rapidly approaching his hiding-place.

Though swift of foot, there was no chance for him to escape. For all that, instinct led him to take to his heels.

For some distance down the hill, which was very steep, he was able to keep in

advance of his mounted pursuers. But once on the level ground, the horsemen soon closed upon him, and the chase was brought to an abrupt termination by one of them striking him from behind with the butt of his gun, and rolling him flat upon his face.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONGO A CAPTIVE.

THE horsemen pulled up with a shout of exultation.

“What did you stop for?” asked the one who had struck the blow. “Why didn’t you keep on running?” he added, with a fiendish laugh, as he leant over the prostrate body of the Kaffir.

“Yaas, why don’t yer go on to tell where der two cameels be to der fools who found ’um?” asked the other. “Why don’t you do datsh?”

The two men who were addressing the half-unconscious Congo, were the same two Willem, Arend, and Hendrick had met the day before—the men who had directed them to search to the south.

One was the brother of Mynheer Von Ormon; the other was his brother-in-law.

They were men who had for many years been living on the borders of the colony—part of the time engaged in fighting Kaffirs and Gregrias, and robbing them of their cattle; the other part in trading with the natives for ostrich feathers and ivory.

They had lately returned from an unsuccessful expedition to the north, the object of which had been to secure two young giraffes, in order to obtain the reward or

price offered for them by the Consul of the Netherlands.

On seeing within the kraal of their kinsman, Mynheer Von Ormon, the very animals they had sacrificed so much time in vainly searching for, they could not resist the opportunity of appropriating them.

Their idea was to conceal the animals for a few weeks among the hills, until those to whom they properly belonged, giving them up as lost, should return to their homes.

The giraffes might then be taken to Cape Town, and disposed of without the original owners ever knowing anything of the trick that had been played upon them.

Unfortunately for Congo, they had that morning been searching for something for

food, and had returned just in time to see him playing spy upon their camp.

“This is the villain who pretended to quarrel with his master, and leave him,” said the man who had knocked the Kaffir down. “I told Von Ormon to send him off with the others; but he was sure the fellow did not want to assist them, and could not if he would. By his folly our game has been nearly lost. We’ve just been in time; but what are we to do with the black brute, now that we’ve caught him?”

“Kill him!” replied the other, who was the brother of Von Ormon. “He mus’ never get to de white mens. Dey would come an’ rob us all.”

“Very likely. Some people are bad enough to do anything; but I have

half killed this fellow already; you may do your share, and finish him, if you like."

"No, Shames, as you pegins this little job, it is best you finish it yourself."

Bad as were the two ruffians into whose hands Congo had fallen, neither of them liked to give him the *coup de grace*; and, undecided what else to do with him, they tied his hands behind his back.

He was then assisted to his feet, and, reeling like a drunken man, was led towards their camp.

Congo soon began to recover from the effects of the blow, and became sensible of the danger he was in. By their talk he could tell that they intended to put him out of the way.

From their savage looks and gestures he

could see there was but little hope of his life being spared.

His captors would not dare to let him escape. He had learnt too much to be allowed to live. No assistance could be expected from his master and his companions; they were waiting for him far away.

“Is this the game you have brought back?” exclaimed the man sitting over the camp fire, as the others came up, dragging their captive after them.

“Yes; and as you are the cook, you must dress it for our dinners!” replied he who answered to the name of “Shames.”

“Well, why don’t you tell me what this means?” interrogated the first.

“Only that we have caught a spy—we have been tracked by him to this place.

But there's no great harm yet. We're in luck, and nothing can go wrong with us. Our catching this fellow is a proof of it."

A long consultation was now carried on between the ruffians, in which they all agreed in the necessity of putting the prisoner to death.

It would never do to let him live. He would, in the end, bring them into trouble, even if kept a prisoner for years. His tongue must be silenced for ever!

There was but one way of silencing it—that was, never to allow him to leave the place alive.

There was a point upon which his captors were a little in doubt. Had the Kaffir undertaken the task of tracking them on his own responsibility, or with the knowledge and at the instigation of

his master? In the former case only would they be safe in destroying him. In the latter, the act might be attended by danger.

To make sure of this, one of the three men—Von Ormon's brother it was—proposed going back to the house, there, if possible, to ascertain how the case stood.

To this the other two readily consented; and, mounting his horse, he rode off for the kraal of his kinsman. As soon as he was gone, the others tied Congo to a tree, and then, seating themselves under the shade of the kameel-doorn, they proceeded to amuse themselves with a game of cards.

Four hours passed—hours that to the Kaffir seemed days.

He was in a state of indescribable agony.

The thongs of hide that bound his wrists to the branches, were cutting into the flesh ; and, besides, there was before his mind the positive certainty that he had not much longer to live.

The fear of death, however, scarce gave him so much mental pain as his anxiety to know something of the fate of his companions, and his wish that Groot Willem should recover the giraffes.

He now regretted that he had not revealed his suspicions at the last interview with his young master. This might have saved the hunters their loss, and himself from the fate that now threatened him. It was too late. He had acted for the best, but acted wrongly.

In the afternoon, Von Ormon's brother came riding back to the camp.

"Well! what news?" asked James, as he came within speaking distance.

"It ish all right. Dey don't know nothing of what's up. Mine prudder have constant watch over their camp. They pe in von quandary, and will soon go home."

"Is Von Ormon sure that they hadn't any communication with this Kaffir?" asked James.

"Yesh, they had. One of them came to the housh, and saw this fella yesterday. Put for all that, plackie never said von leetle word to him. They were well watch while they wash togedder."

"Then perhaps it is not all right, as you say. They may have the same suspicion that led him here. Why the deuce don't they go off home? I don't like this hanging about so long."

"I tell you, Shames, it ish all right. We have only to get rid of the spy. He mush never see the fools who own him again. What ish we to do with him?"

"Send a bullet through his body," said the man who had been left in charge of the giraffes.

"Yes, he must be killed in that way, or some other, certainly," said James; "but which of us is to do it? It's a pity we did not shoot him down while he was running. Then was the time. I don't like the thing now that I've cooled down."

Bad as the ruffians were, they did not like to commit a murder in cold blood. They had determined that Congo must die, yet none of them wished to act as the executioner.

After a good deal of discussion, and

some wrangling, a bright idea flashed across the brain of Von Ormon's brother.

He proposed that their prisoner should be taken to a pool that was some distance down the gorge; that he should be tied to a tree by the side of the pool, and left there for the night.

"I see the spoor of lion there every mornin'," said he, grinning horribly as he spoke. "I'll pet mine life we find no more of this plack fella put a few red spots!"

This plan was agreeable to all; and at sundown the Kaffir was released from his fastenings, conducted down the narrow valley, and firmly spliced to a sapling that stood close to the edge of the pool.

To provide against any chance of his

being heard and released by a stray traveller, a stick was stuck crosswise in his mouth, the bight of a string made fast over each end of it, and then securely knotted at the back of his head.

After taking a survey of his fastenings, to see that there was no danger of their coming undone, his cruel captors made him a mocking salute, and, bidding him "good-bye," strode off towards their camp.

CHAPTER XXII.

A FIGHT BY FIRELIGHT.

ANXIOUSLY did Groot Willem wait for the next morning, and the promised visit from Congo.

But the morning came, and passed, without any Congo.

Willem became impatient, and could not content himself any longer in the camp.

“This will not do,” exclaimed he, as he saw that the sun was again going down in the sky; “we must not remain here.

Perhaps Congo *cannot* come. Of course he cannot, or he would have been here before now. We must look for him; but it will not do for all of us to go together. Hendrick, you come with me!"

Hendrick responded readily to the invitation. The two mounted their horses, and rode off towards the residence of Von Ormon.

From the behaviour of Congo, when Willem had last seen him, the latter was quite certain that his visits at the kraal were not desired. The Kaffir probably supposed that they might interfere with his plans, by bringing suspicion upon himself.

This, however, did not prevent Willem from going to see him once more. Congo had broken his promise, and that was a proof that something must be wrong.

On their new visit to Mynheer Von Ormon, that gentleman did not take the slightest trouble to show them civility.

“Dat plack villin you call Congo,” said he, “goed away last night; me thought he vash mit you. When you fint him again, take him to der duyfel if you likes, and keep him dare!”

“Do you think he has gone away from this place?” asked Willem of Hendrick, as they rode off from Von Ormon’s enclosures.

“Yes,” answered Hendrick, “I see no reason to doubt it.”

“But why did he not come to me, as he promised?”

“There’s some good reason for his not having done so.”

“I wish I knew in what direction he had gone.”

“ That difficulty may soon be removed,” said Hendrick ; “ I fancy I can tell it to a point of the compass. It will be found a little to east of north.”

“ Why do you say that ? ”

“ Because it was in that quarter we encountered the two men, on the day after the giraffes were missing. Moreover, we know they are not south, for that is the way those false guides wanted us to take.”

Too excited to return to camp without doing something, Willem proposed that they should ride out on the plain, towards the north-east, and see whether anything could be learnt about Congo. .

To this Hendrick agreed ; and, after going southward about a mile from Von Ormon’s house, they turned, rode circuit-

ously around it, and then struck off for the north-east.

They had no great hope of finding the object of their search, but it was necessary for them to do something; and as Hendrick's surmise was not without some probability, they kept on.

After making about five miles across the plain, they came within sight of some hills, that began to loom up on the horizon to the north-east. They were still, to all appearance, about four miles distant.

"Just the place where our property might be concealed," suggested Hendrick. "No one would hide giraffes on a plain. If we do not find them yonder, and on this very night, we deserve to lose them."

The sun was just setting as they reached the crest of the first range of

hills. Looking back over the road they had just travelled, a horseman was seen coming across the plain, a mile distant from the spot where they had halted.

“If we watch that man,” said Hendrick, “and not let him see us, we shall probably find what we are in search of. If not one of the thieves himself, he looks to me very much like a messenger, going to them from Von Ormon’s. From the behaviour of the boer, I am now convinced that the giraffes have been stolen, and Von Ormon himself is the thief.”

Riding in among some trees, they dismounted; and, securing their horses in the cover, watched the man who was approaching from the plain.

In the twilight they saw him toil slowly up the slope, a little to the east

of them, and then continue his course over the summit of the ridge, going on towards the next.

The night was now so dark that he could not be kept in sight without their riding very near to him. In this there would be danger. The hoof-strokes of their horses might be heard.

To avoid this, they permitted him to keep far in advance, and rode slowly and noiselessly after, trusting to chance to conduct them upon his track. Fortune favoured them.

On mounting a hill, about half a mile from the place where they had seen the lone horseman, they came in sight of a camp fire that appeared burning in the bottom of the ravine below.

Both dismounted, tied their horses to

the trees, and silently stole towards the light.

It grew larger and brighter as they advanced upon it. Without the slightest danger of being themselves seen, they drew nearer and nearer, until they could make out the figures of three men seated around the blaze. These appeared engaged in an earnest confabulation.

But for the messenger who had gone back to the house of Mynheer Von Ormon, Willem and Hendrick might have long wandered about the hills, without seeing anything to reward them for their journey.

As it was, they saw that which caused Willem a thrill of joy so intense that he could scarce restrain himself from crying out.

Congo's suspicions, whether based upon instinct or reason, had not been idle fancies.

Tied to a tree, under the glare of the camp fire, stood two young giraffes,—the animals that had not strayed, but been stolen !

A hurried consultation took place between the two hunters. They must obtain possession of their property ; but how ? They did not wish to be killed in the endeavour to right themselves ; and they did not wish to kill those who had robbed them, if they could avoid doing so.

“Let us give them a chance !” said Willem. “If they will surrender the stolen giraffes peacefully, we will let them off. If not, then I mean to shoot them

down without mercy. We must take the law into our own hands. There is not a court, or magistrate, within one hundred miles of us."

While they were thus hastily arranging a plan of action, the three men seated around the fire commenced cooking their suppers.

Only a few more words were interchanged between Willem and Hendrick, who had come to an understanding as to how they should act.

Carrying their guns at full cock, they crept silently forward, side by side, and close together. Under cover of the timber, they advanced within ten paces of the unsuspecting thieves, and then boldly stepped out into the light.

"Keep your seats!" cried Groot Willem,

in a loud, commanding voice. "The first of you that stirs shall die like a dog!"

The man known as "Shames" showed signs of an intention to spring to his feet, and seize hold of a gun that lay near. "Don't! for your soul's sake, don't!" shouted the great hunter.

The warning was not heeded; and the man rushed towards the gun, took it up, and at once brought it to the level. But before he could touch the trigger, Willem's roer delivered its loud report; and the thief fell forward into the fire!

Von Ormon's brother, not heeding the fate of his companion, made some show of resistance, but this was instantly ended by a blow from the butt of Groot

Willem's gun, which he now held clubbed in his hand.

The third of the thieves did not stay for similar treatment, but bolted from the camp at a pace that would have left most horses behind him.

The guns of all three were picked up, discharged, and then smashed against a tree. The giraffes were untied, and taken up to the place where the horses had been left; after which, Willem and Hendrick mounted into their saddles, and, leading the camelopards between them, commenced a backward march towards the camp, where they had left their companions.

The fate of the two men left by the fire, remained from that moment unknown to our adventurers. Nor did they care to inquire about it. Before leaving the

spot, it was seen that neither of them had received a mortal wound; and, as there was one still unharmed to take care of them, in all probability they recovered.

This at least was the hope and belief of the hunters.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ALL RIGHT ONCE MORE.

ON finding himself tied to a tree, gagged, and abandoned, Congo could see but one chance of his being released from his confinement, and that was by some beast of prey.

He was quite sure that those who had left him there would never return to relieve him.

His reflections were anything but pleasant: they bore some resemblance to those of a sick man who has been

assured by his physician that there is no chance for him to recover.

The Kaffir was not one to give way to a cowardly fear of death; but there was another thought in his mind almost as disagreeable, and that was the chagrin he felt at not being able to see his beloved master again, and make known his discovery of the giraffes.

He even thought, while waiting for his approaching fate, that if by any means he could let Groot Willem know where his property was concealed, he could then die content.

An hour passed, and a heavy darkness gathered around him. It was the shade of night. A few small animals of the antelope kind came trotting up to the pool, and quenched their thirst.

They were followed by some jackals. Other visitors might soon be expected—visitors that might not depart without rudely releasing him from his confinement.

Half an hour later, and his eyes, piercing through the gloom of the night, became fixed upon a quadruped whose species he could not well make out. It appeared about the size of a leopard. It was crawling slowly and silently towards him.

It drew nearer; and just as he thought it was about to spring on him, it uttered a low moaning noise. Congo recognized the dog Spoor'em!

For a moment there was joy in the African's soul. The faithful dog was still living, and had not forsaken him. If he was to die, it would be in the company

of the most affectionate friend a man can have among the brute creation. Groot Willem and the giraffes were for a while forgotten.

As the dog crawled close up to him, Congo saw that it carried one leg raised from the ground, and that the hair from the shoulder downward was clotted with blood.

Spoor'em appeared to forget the pain of his wound in the joy of again meeting his master; and never had Congo felt so strongly the wish to be able to speak.

Gagged as he was, he could not. Not one kind word of encouragement could he give to the creature that, despite its own sufferings, had not forsaken him. He knew that the dog was listening for the familiar tones of his voice, and looked

reproachful that he was not allowed to hear them.

Congo did not wish even a brute to think him ungrateful, and yet there was no way by which he could let Spoor'em know that such was the case.

Not long after the arrival of the dog, Congo heard the report of a gun. To the sharp ears of the Kaffir, it seemed to have a familiar sound. It was very loud, and like the report of a roer. It sounded like Groot Willem's gun; but how could the hunter be there? Congo could not hope it was he.

Some minutes of profound silence succeeded the shot, which was then followed by three others; and once more all was still.

A quarter of an hour passed, and hoof-

strokes were heard on the hill above. A party of horsemen were riding along the crest of the ridge. Congo could hear their voices mingling with the heavy footfall of the horses.

They were about to pass by the spot.

“The thieves,” thought Congo; “they are shifting their quarters.”

They were not more than a hundred yards from the tree where he was tied; and as they came opposite, and just as he became satisfied that they were going on without chance of seeing him, he heard a sort of struggle, followed by the words: “Hold up a minute, Hendrick, my horse has got on one side of a tree, and Tootla the other.”

The voice was Willem’s, and “Tootla” was the name of one of the young giraffes!

Congo made a desperate effort to force his hands from their fastenings, as well as to remove the stick that was distending his jaws. The struggle was in vain!

There appeared no way by which he could sound an alarm, and let his friends know that he was near. He could think of none.

They were leaving him. They would return to Graaff-Reinet, and he should be left to die at the foot of the tree, or be torn from it by wild beasts. He was almost frantic with despair, when an idea suddenly occurred to him.

He could not speak himself, but why could not the dog do so for him? His feet were still free; and, raising one of them, he gave Spoor'em a kick—a cruel kick!

The poor animal crouched at his feet, and uttered a low whine. It could not have been heard thirty paces away.

Again the foot was lifted, and dashed against the ribs of the unfortunate dog, that neither made an effort to avoid the blow, nor any complaint at receiving it.

The only answer vouchsafed was but a low, querulous whine, that seemed to say : " Why is this, master ? In what have I offended you ? "

Just as the foot was lifted for the third time, the air reverberated to a long, loud roar. It was the voice of a hungry lion, that appeared to be only a few paces from the spot. Spoor'em instantly sprang to his feet, and answered the king of beasts by a loud defiant bark.

The faithful animal, that would not resist its master's ill-treatment, was but too ready to defend that master from the attack of a third party!

In the bark of Spoor'em there was an idiosyncrasy. It was heard, and instantly recognized.

The moment after, Congo had the pleasure of hearing the tramp of horses, as they came trotting down the hill, and the voice of Willem calling out to him!

When released from the tree, and the gag taken from his mouth, the first words he uttered were those of apology to Spoor'em, for the kicks he had just administered. From the demonstrations made by the dumb creature, there was every reason to believe that he accepted the

apology in the spirit in which it was given !

Willem compelled Congo, who had now been thirty-six hours without food, to mount upon his own horse ; but this the Kaffir would only consent to do on the condition that he should be allowed to take Spoor'em up along with him.

They at once started away from the spot, and by an early hour of the following morning reached the camp, where Hans, Arend, and the others had remained.

Swartboy, in the joy of seeing them again, increased by the sight of the giraffes, declared that he would never more call Congo a fool.

This promise he has never been known to break.

In the afternoon, the journey towards

Graaff-Reinet was resumed — Spoor'em being carried for two or three days on the back of one of the oxen, snugly ensconced in a large willow basket, woven by Congo for that express purpose.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

ONE evening after a long day's journey, our adventurers found themselves within a few miles of home. A gallop of an hour or two would place them in the society of the relatives and friends from whom they had been so long absent.

Arend and Hendrick were impatient to ride forward in advance of the company ; but each refrained from making the proposition to the other.

Greatly to their annoyance, they saw Hans and Willem halt at the house of a boer, and commence making arrangements for passing the night.

This the two did as unconcernedly as though they were still hundreds of miles from home.

Both Willem and Hans possessed a fair share of old-fashioned Dutch philosophy, which told them no circumstances should hinder them from being merciful to the animals that had served them so long and so well.

Early next morning, as the hunters passed through Graaff-Reinet, on the way to their own homes, all the inhabitants of the village turned out to bid them welcome.

By most of the people dwelling in the

place, the young giraffes were looked upon with as much astonishment as the four Makalolo felt while gazing upon the spire of the village church.

There was not an inhabitant of the place over ten years of age, who had not heard something of the expedition on which our adventurers had set forth some months before. All knew the objects for which it had been undertaken; and of course the majority had prophesied another failure in the accomplishment of what so many experienced hunters had already been unable to effect.

"We are now returning home in a respectable manner," remarked Hendrick to the others; as he observed the enthusiastic spirit in which they were welcomed by the people.

“Yes,” answered Arend; “and it is to Willem’s perseverance that we owe all this.”

“I don’t know that I’ve displayed any great perseverance, as you call it,” said Willem. “I was as anxious as any of you to return home; but I did not like to come back without a couple of young giraffes. That was all the difference between us!”

The others made no reply, but rode on silently, thinking of the generosity of their gigantic companion.

On former expeditions, our adventurers had been absent even a longer time; but never did home seem so dear to them as now; and never did they find on their return so warm a welcome as that extended to them now.

The two young ladies, Trüey Von Bloom, and Wilhemina Van Wyk, were delighted at again meeting with their lovers; and, what is more, were honest enough to admit that such was the case.

Congo and Swartboy endeavoured to repay themselves for the hardships of the past, by assuming grand airs over the other servants, domestics belonging to their masters; as also by an unusual indulgence in eating, drinking, and sleeping.

Groot Willem had still another journey to accomplish. It was to accompany Hans to Cape Town, on his intended trip to Europe, and to deliver to the Dutch Consul the captured camelopards.

This journey, however, was not under-

taken until he had given himself, his horse, and the giraffes a month's rest.

During this time, the Makalolo were treated with the greatest kindness by all the household of the two families to which their young friends belonged.

Before returning to the North, each was presented with a horse, a gun, and a suit of clothes; and several useful presents were sent by Groot Willem to his generous friend, and protector Macora.

Previous to his departure for Europe, Hans desired to be present at two important ceremonies that must, sooner or later, take place, and in which the families of Von Bloom and Van Wyk were both more or less interested.

But Hans was impatient to set out

on his intended tour, and Hendrick and Arend were much pleased that such was the case.

Under these circumstances, Miss Trüey and Miss Wilhemina were prevailed upon to appoint an early day for making the two cornets the happiest of men.

* * * * *

The day after the double marriage, Willem and Hans started for Cape Town, taking with them the giraffes, and the ivory they had brought from the North.

The animals that had cost so much time and toil in procuring, were delivered to the Consul, and the bounty-money handed over.

The camelopards became fellow-passengers of the young philosopher in the voyage to Europe.

Willem parted with them and Hans as the ship was getting "under way;" and on the same day started back to his distant home in Graaff-Reinet.

There he still dwells, endeavouring to pass his time in peaceful pursuits; but this endeavour he finds great difficulty in carrying out—partly through his own restless desire to seek new adventures, and partly through the solicitations of young Jan and Klaas, who, stimulated by the tales told by their elder brothers, are now keenly anxious to relinquish the pursuit of knowledge for that of game.

Hendrick and Arend have no longer a desire to go in quest of such sport. Home is now too dear to them; and both are satisfied to leave to their younger brothers

the pleasure of spending a few months on the far frontier, earning, as they so nobly did, the title of GIRAFFE HUNTERS.

THE END.

MESSRS. HURST AND BLACKETT'S

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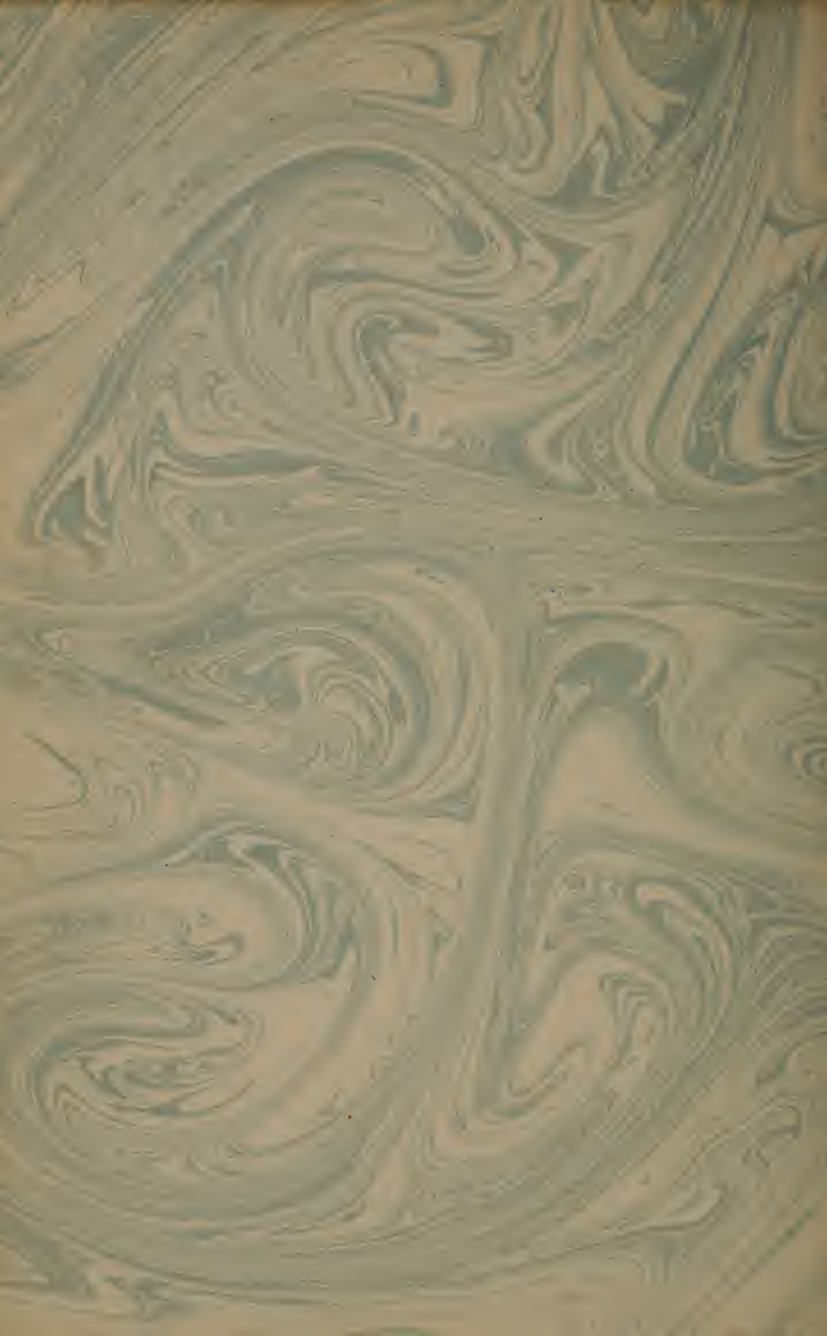
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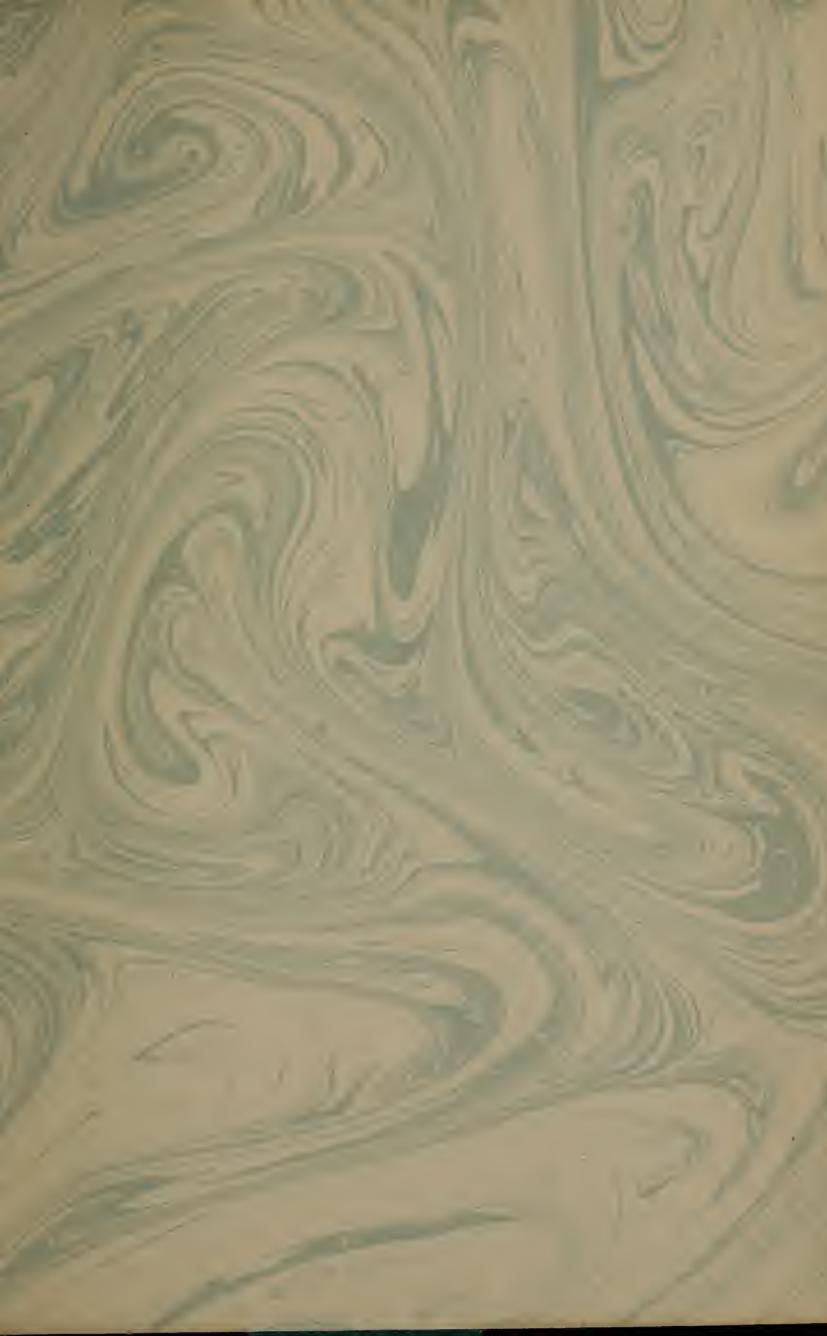
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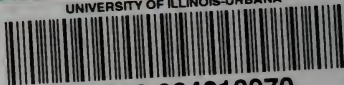
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